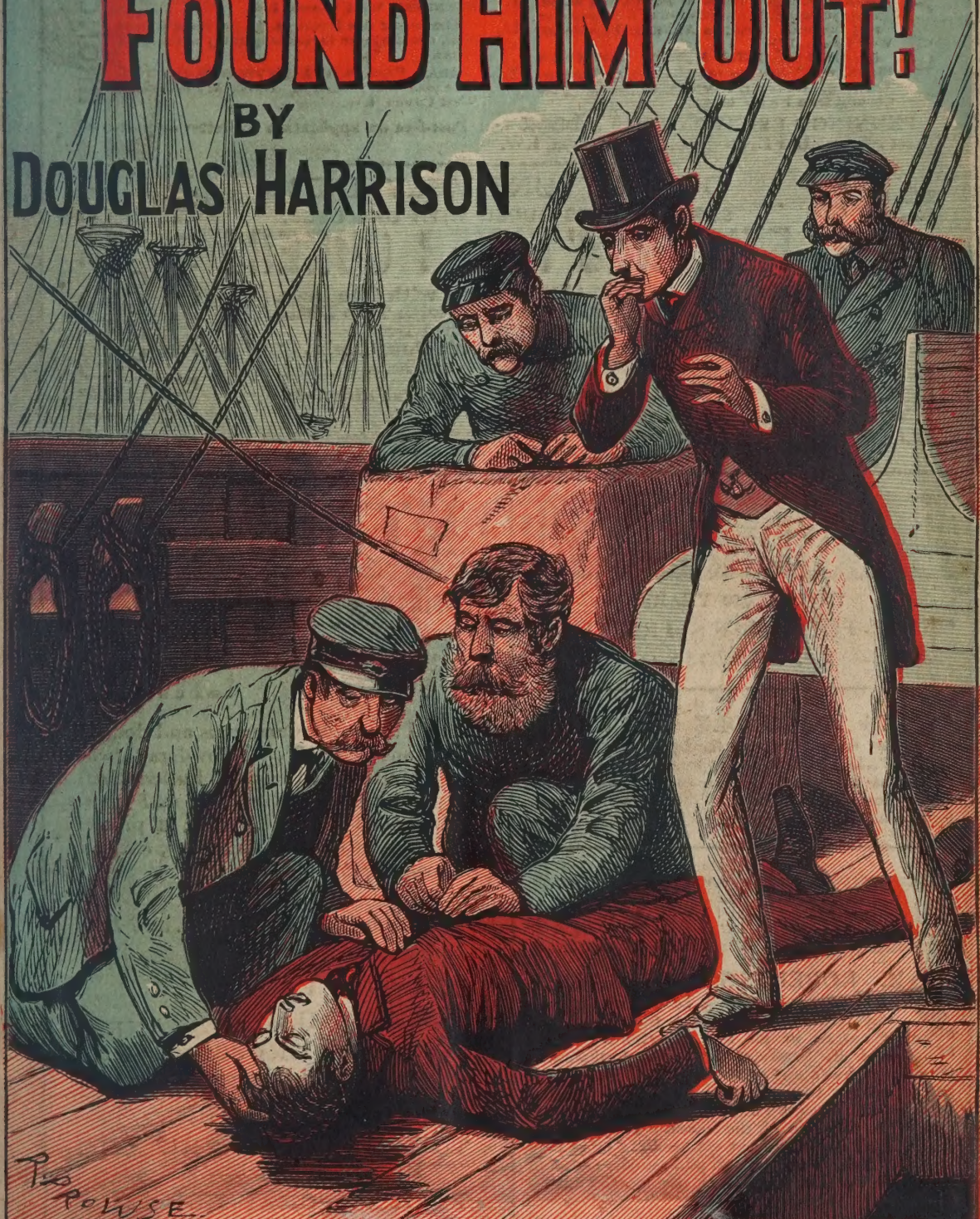


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CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

MR. SKELTON'S SIN.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN	9
II.	THE COLONEL'S TACTICS	15
III.	A NEWSPAPER CUTTING	21
IV.	A SPOILT LUNCHEON	21
V.	ON BOARD THE "POTOSI"	28

BOOK II.

BURIED ALIVE.

VI.	"A BOX O' BONES"	40
VII.	OLIVE	49
VIII.	THE DETECTIVE'S DISCOVERY	57
IX.	"BODY-SNATCHING"	69
X.	THE DETECTIVE'S LITTLE MISTAKE	77

BOOK III.

THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL.

CHAP.		PAGE
XI.	"SATAN"	87
XII.	"ROGUES FALL OUT"	98
XIII.	MR. SKELTON CONTEMPLATES MATRIMONY ...	105

BOOK IV.

RETRIBUTION

XIV.	A BAD LOOK-OUT FOR THE LOOKERS	117
XV.	NEMESIS ON A HANSOM	127
XVI.	"RISEN FROM THE DEAD"	132
XVII.	"THE MAY WEEK"	142

BOOK I.

MR. SKELTON'S SIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL LOOKER, late 12th Hussars, was an impecunious man. His career had been a failure. But there had been a time when his prospects were most brilliant. Few young officers had so many opportunities of distinguishing themselves as he in the earlier part of his long Indian service; none had been more popular; yet when he was called upon to sheathe his sword not a man in the regiment had a good word for him.

A cornet at the time the Mutiny broke out, he had volunteered to serve as a private in the hastily collected body of horse with which Havelock marched on his mission of rescue. Every subaltern in the regiment would have followed "Filthy Lucre's" example had it been allowed, just that they might ride in the ranks by their comrade's side. He fought in seventeen actions in that memorable campaign: with the rest, he entered Lucknow, to be beleaguered with the brave band who held that shot-torn hold, consecrated for ever by the valour of British men and the fortitude of British women. Wounded almost to death, he was carried out after the relief by Colin Campbell's men. Since then he had served in many stations, and had filled many appointments. Still, when his time as a major was over, it

was intimated to him that he had better take his pension and honorary rank.

He had brought sorrow and ruin upon the home of the brigadier in command.

Comparatively young, and full of energy, he was, like so many more of his class, desperately anxious to find some way of adding a few hundreds a year to the slender income he enjoyed. He was ready to do anything except economise. He had been a candidate for almost every kind of appointment for which military men are supposed to be peculiarly qualified, but the black mark against him ensured his non-success. Company-promoting, a little horse-dealing, a little coaching for Sandhurst and Woolwich—all had failed him in turn. At last he had turned to pigeon-plucking as the only chance for feathering the nest. It was not a very profitable business, and the Colonel had got to the end of his tether. County-court summonses were pouring in, and the landlord threatened an execution. The situation was desperate. Notwithstanding the apparent luxury in which they lived, the Lookers were on their very last legs.

It is a warm autumn evening, and the French window of the little Hampstead villa is thrown open. The light from the rose-coloured lamp-shade flickers in the breeze that fitfully waves the hangings of the room, sending alternate shadow and shine over the tasteful furniture by Stubbings and Grimshaw, of Oxford Street (unpaid for, and saddled with a bill of sale). The Tantalus-stand is on the table at the Colonel's elbow, and opposite him sits the latest pigeon, Mr. Robert Wentworth Skelton, bending over his third hand in the ninth rubber of écarté. A few sovereigns lie on the table, and not a few strips of paper inscribed with the letters I.O.U. Skelton, who poses at Hampstead as a financial authority in the city—though the Colonel knows well enough he is not half-way up the list of clerks in a big bank—is exceedingly particular about what he calls "booking up" after every rubber.

Both the men are morally alike in this, that they have not a single shred of principle; but how different they are in appearance. The Colonel, tall, well set up, burly, bronzed, and forty-nine, sits back in his chair, holding his cards well raised with one hand, whilst he incessantly strokes and twists his moustache with the other. Skelton, just about half the Colonel's age, is pale and slight, with a curve in the shoulders that no amount of drill could ever eradicate. His thin red eyebrows meet above a nose that would be fairly well shaped, were it not for the extraordinary sharpness of its point. With thin fingers, the joints of which are flat yet prominent at the sides, like the protuberances upon an ashen twig, he handles the cards he holds close to his breast as he leans forward over the table. Skelton is keen over his game; the Colonel's resolute face is unchanged whether fortune is for or against him.

Mrs. Looker flits about the room. She plays a page or so from *The Mikado* when she sees from the Colonel's manner it is important Skelton's attention should be distracted. She seats herself in a low chair, and stretches out her pretty foot, that the guest may note the symmetry of the ankle veiled by the embroidered stocking, whenever he betrays signs of thinking the evening's amusement has gone on long enough.

At last there is a pause; the cards are thrown aside, and Skelton begins to count the hieroglyphics pencilled on the scraps of paper.

"Thirty-five, I think, Colonel?" he remarks, with a sickly smile.

"That's it, I believe," is the answer. "With the fifteen last Friday that just makes an even fifty. If you don't mind giving me one for the fifty, I will tear up all the rest."

Mr. Skelton, of Baigent and Company, did not like losing his money, or rather money that was not his. Whatever the Colonel's opinion upon the matter might be, he had not gone to Livadia Lodge for that. He went because he imagined he had found favour in Mrs. Looker's sight.

When the game was over that lady's work ended for the evening, and she quietly withdrew.

"Just a cigar, Skelton, before you go. We will take our chairs and glasses out into the garden."

Skelton seemed inclined to take his departure. He wanted to think over his losses; but, in the hope that Mrs. Looker might presently return, he sulkily seated himself outside the window.

The Colonel led the talk to India, telling a story or two of the wonderful tricks of Hindoo conjurers.

"I don't know whether you have ever heard," he presently proceeded, "of the way in which some of the fakirs there can produce suspended animation. I myself knew an old man who was able to throw himself into a state that could not be distinguished from death—no pulse, no breath, nothing you could see to tell you he was not a corpse."

"I've read of that kind of thing," remarked Skelton, "but no one in his senses could believe it."

"I can assure you, my friend, it is perfectly true," rejoined the Colonel. "The first time I saw it done was at a Rajah's near Lahore. The fakir, an old wrinkled man, whom I had once before met, when I saved him from the too pressing attentions of a knot of drunken English soldiers, came forward and seated himself on the ground. His nostrils were stopped with wax by an assistant, his tongue was thrust back into his throat; in a minute or two his head fell forward, and Marsden, the surgeon of the station, who was with us, pronounced him dead. He was placed in a sitting posture, in a tomb that had been built in readiness, and the door was sealed up. The Rajah placed a sentry at the grave, and the spot was never left unwatched for twenty-one days. At the end of the three weeks the tomb was unsealed; he was still to all appearance dead. The wax was removed; his mouth was opened. His attendant rubbed his limbs, and treated him just as you may have seen a doctor treat one who is apparently drowned. In a few minutes he began to breathe; and in less than a quarter of an

hour after we had taken him out of the ground he walked away, as well as ever, with the Rajah's and our rupees in his cummerbund."

"That's just as I have read more than once," said Skelton; "but you will excuse my saying, Colonel, that if you had not seen it yourself nothing could make me believe such an improbable tale."

"You are like Marsden. He was at first an entire disbeliever in the trick, till he saw it himself," said the Colonel. "He thought it was a mere piece of conjuring, and that the man was never put into the tomb at all; a dummy used, or something of that kind. But there is nothing of the sort about it. Listen to me"—the Colonel laid down his cigar and bent towards Skelton—"I know the secret of it. I told you I had saved the fakir from insult. It was insult of such a kind that he and his co-religionists think worse than death. The man was grateful; I met him again a year later, when he was dying in real earnest, and he gave me the secret of the whole thing."

"Mesmerism?" queried Skelton.

"No," said the Colonel, "nothing of that kind; it is the effect of a drug. I have undergone it myself once. The stopping with wax is all nonsense—the 'business' of the trick, you understand. You take a certain quantity of a secret drug, and it throws you into a state of suspended animation which lasts exactly three weeks. You come back just like waking out of sleep. I should not care to be sealed-up, though, as the fakir was."

"I should rather think not," said Skelton. "What a fine thing it would be if one could only manage to get a few bets on about it, eh?"

"Well now, I've told you this because I've got a big idea. You and I are both short of money, very short indeed."

Skelton nodded.

"What would you say to an insurance being effected, and the doctor certifying that the person in the catalepsy was dead?"

They stared each other straight in the eye for a quarter of a minute.

"You understand?" said the Colonel. "Think it over."

Presently Skelton observed, "Now supposing that the thing could be properly worked, the difficulty would be this: you would not get any insurance company to pay up till three months after the date of death."

"I've thought of that," said the Colonel, eagerly. "But you, a man in a bank, ought to know well enough that banks lend money on insurance policies, particularly when the death has happened. Now what I am going to try for is a neat little sum of ten thousand, and if you like to conduct matters after my death has taken place you shall have a thousand of the money."

"Ah, ah!" thought Skelton, "you'll be safely buried, my gallant friend, and when you are out of the way, there you'll have to stop. You won't be wanted. I'll take it all, and dry the tears of somebody."

"You mean," he said aloud, "I am to see about the funeral, and get the money borrowed, and dig you up again?"

"Funeral be d——d," said the Colonel, hastily. "You don't think I'm such a fool as to run *that* risk. I shall just stay quietly in a top room till the trance is over, and then retire gracefully from Hampstead and the vicinity. You can bury a coffin full of brickbats; but I shall keep above ground, thank you."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Skelton to himself.

"Well, Colonel, it all seems quite feasible," he resumed; "the only thing is, have you got the stuff, and is it not too old and stale to do its office?"

"It will keep for a hundred years, the fakir assured me," replied Colonel Looker. "I've got it locked up in my desk all right. You must just think it all well over, and we must get our plans perfect. There must be no mistakes. We can't have any Romeo and Juliet business over a thing of this kind. Come again tomorrow, Skelton, and we will go further into the matter."

"All right, I will," returned the bank-clerk, as he took leave of his fellow-conspirator.

CHAPTER II.

THE COLONEL'S TACTICS.

THOSE who have plumbed the mighty ocean depths—sent the instruments of modern science five thousand fathoms down—tell us that the great hollows in Neptune's bosom answer fairly well to the heights of earth's loftiest peaks. So in this age of giants, this great nineteenth century, we have a race of intellectual pigmies as a set-off to our Anakim of the mind.

You find them in every large city; they gather in the stucco suburbs, where they live mostly with and upon their mothers. They are, you will observe, generally the sons of widows. When those worthy men their fathers—professional men with good incomes for the most part—were alive, the pigmies were sent to decent schools, and learnt to ape the ways of their betters. When the fathers died, worn out before their time with the stress and strain of the struggle of modern life, and dying, left nothing but life assurance policies, then the widows sought counsel of their friends, and made gentlemen-clerks of the Berties and Algernons. Hence we have the modern masher, the equivalent of the "'Arry" of a lower stratum.

They have not been present with us long enough for us to see them grown old and grey and shabby. But the time is coming when death will claim the widows in their turn, the proceeds of the life insurances will have to go to the girls, and the gentleman-clerk at one hundred and fifty pounds a year will be left to maintain himself. The whole tribe of them will then most likely rot away, as do the sheep of a small Australian squatter in a bad season. They are without energy, without vital force: the only qualities they have are vanity

and selfishness ; these of so poor a kind they cannot even be called instincts of self-preservation.

Robert Wentworth Skelton was one of these promising young men. His father had been a solicitor in fair practice, making between two and three thousand a year, and spending it. This useful man died and left an elegant widow ; an equally elegant daughter, Anastasia, aged twenty ; a son at Wellington College, Robert, aged sixteen ; a life-policy for twelve thousand pounds ; a house full of furniture, and two thousand pounds' worth of debts. Genteel poverty stared them in the face.

The late much-lamented solicitor had a surviving brother, a solicitor also, who had turned his attention to the accumulation of riches more than to their dissipation. He made money by a process that need not be explained ; it came in at the rate of sixty per cent. on his capital, which therefore grew enormously year by year. This acquisitive person laid house to house and field to field ; and, when his brother shuffled off his cares, had a mansion at Stanmore in which he lived alone a bachelor, and a villa in St. John's Wood where he by no means lived in solitude.

Mrs. Skelton appealed to her brother-in-law for advice. He gave it, but gave nothing else. Robert left school and became a junior clerk in the bank of Baigent, Coxon and Company. He lived with his mother and sister at Hampstead, in a fifty-pound house.

He was, like others of his class, utterly lazy and selfish, and more unprincipled, more self-indulgent than most. Selfishness with his kind usually stops at the doing of anything that can be punished when found out ; but occasionally Robert Skelton was blind to the possibility of punishment ; self-indulgence made him reckless.

Some days preceding his conversation with Colonel Looker, Mr. Skelton had involved himself in a difficulty—very easy to get into, but not quite so easy to get out of : therefore it was that he had been disposed to lend a ready ear to the gallant officer's suggestion.

Mr. James Carrick, assistant librarian in the British Museum, had sought the city one afternoon. A man of books and not a man of business, a pale student with a far-away look in his dreamy eyes, he was not the kind of man you would trust to make a clever bargain on your behalf. His brother Henry, absent in Roumania, making a railway for Baird and Co., the great contractors, made a serious mistake when he left the management of his monetary affairs at home to bookish James.

Just before closing time, James Carrick presented himself at the paying-in counter of the Bank of Baigent, Coxon and Co., Lombard Street, where his own and his brother's modest accounts were kept. He addressed himself to an undersized, sharp-nosed, foxy-haired young man.

"I want to pay this draft in to Mr. Henry Carrick's account," he began; "it is payable to my order."

"But you can't," replied the clerk, with that suavity which distinguishes his kind when having to do with a small customer. "You can't; don't you see it's crossed?"

"What must I do, then?" asked Carrick, who knew nothing as to the course he ought to take.

"Why, pay it into your own, and draw a cheque for Mr. Henry Carrick."

"But I haven't a cheque with me."

"I'll give you a loose one," was the answer.

The cheque was accordingly drawn, and the draft and cheque paid over.

Now here was an opportunity for borrowing forty pounds, such as had not occurred to the clerk in all the six years he had been in the Bank.

He credited James Carrick with the draft, debited him with the cheque, and paid himself the forty pounds. James had no counterfoil to the cheque, Henry was abroad for an indefinite time, and the cheque therefore had been made to "bearer." All he had to do was to have the paid cheque put into the pocket of James's pass-book, get possession of the book, and "lose"

it. Before James and Henry Carrick could compare notes, he hoped to replace the money.

He found it was not so easy to restore it as he thought. On the 23rd of August he went out into Lombard Street at four o'clock, feeling like the Syracusan gentleman with the sword hanging over his head.

When he emerged from his train at Hampstead, he was unexpectedly met by the Colonel, who put his arm in Skelton's in a familiar way that delighted the clerk's little soul.

"Come, let us stroll up towards the Heath," said he. "I've been thinking seriously about that matter we were talking about last night. Suppose it can be carried out, are you willing to stand in with us? I am placing immense confidence in you, you see; and I should have to ask you to take the greatest care of my poor little wife whilst I am on my travels in the Unknown."

Skelton thought of the lady and of his difficulties. The temptation was too much for him.

"On one condition," he replied—"that you will not take up your abode afterwards in London, or in the neighbourhood."

"Cela va sans dire mon brave," rejoined the Colonel, "Just glance over these papers. I've been up to the Eagle Office to-day, making a few inquiries."

"One difficulty is this, you see," he resumed, presently; "four hundred will have to be paid down on the nail for the policy. Now if we reverse the arrangement, and you are the one to be insured, it would come in very much less. You are not half——"

"Oh, if that's it, Colonel," Skelton interrupted, "I'm off. It's all very well for you, who say you have perfect confidence in the drug, to risk your life, but you see I know nothing about it."

"Well, if you could give me that fifty I have your I.O.U. for, perhaps I could manage some of it. The more I can raise for this premium, the more I can insure for.

"I can't, positively can't, as I told you, till the end

of the quarter. Couldn't you mortgage your pension? You can't draw it, you know, when you are supposed to be dead."

Colonel Looker seemed doubtful. "Then," he continued, "there is this still greater difficulty. If I go off the hooks suddenly, there would be an inquest, and very likely a *post mortem*. That would settle my business completely. I don't want to die by the surgeon's knife. I must try and arrange matters, after the insurance is effected, so that a doctor with a certificate will be forthcoming."

The big scoundrel and the little one presently parted.

Next day steps were taken towards mortgaging the pension, and the four hundred was in a fair way of being raised. The day after, the Colonel was passed by the medical officer of the Eagle. It was all settled by the end of the week.

On the last Sunday in August, the Colonel, sitting with an acquaintance after luncheon, suddenly put his hand to his side, and rolled out of the chair; groaning and writhing, he lay on the floor.

Mrs. Looker rushed, not to her husband's side—bless you, she knew all about it—but to the bell. "Run for Doctor Harper," she cried to the servant. "The Colonel is very ill."

"Oh, Mr. Kortwright," she said to the acquaintance, who was trying to get the Colonel to drink some brandy, "what shall we do? Herbert will die, I know he will!"

The doctor arrived just as the Colonel seemed a little better, and was able to speak. The patient faintly described his symptoms; he had read them all up in a medical book.

Mrs. Looker accompanied the Doctor into the next room on his departure.

"Has he ever had a seizure of this kind before?" asked Dr. Harper.

"Not that I am aware of," she replied. "He is usually so well, never complaining of anything but

pains from old wounds occasionally. What is it, Doctor?"

"Well, it looks like an attack of *angina pectoris*, but it is all over now for this time. Keep him as quiet as possible, and I will write you a little prescription."

"Will it come again? Is it dangerous?" she asked most anxiously.

"Well, it *may* return; and sometimes attacks of the kind are very serious. The great thing is to keep him quiet."

Mrs. Looker buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed, as Dr. Harper withdrew.

"Now, Mr. Kortwright," Mrs. Looker said, returning to him, "I am most grateful to you for your kind help in this emergency, but I am afraid I shall have to be rude—the Colonel is to be kept perfectly quiet."

Mr. Kortwright rose, and took both the lady's hands in his. He was an admirer of Mrs. Looker. "Any thing I can do for you," he said, "please command me in."

Mrs. Looker slightly pressed his hand and thanked him.

When they were alone, Colonel Looker's vivacity returned. As he selected his biggest cigar, he said, "We managed that pretty well, Amy, I think. You could not have done it better, if it had all been genuine."

Mrs. Looker stood beside him, with her head against his shoulder. They were in front of the pier glass, and the lady admired herself whilst the husband looked fondly down on her. Presently she spoke. "When are you going to do it, Herbert?"

"Some time this week, I think. What do you say to Thursday? Think of knowing beforehand the day and hour of one's death! It makes one feel like going to be hanged."

"I wonder how I shall look as a widow!" said Mrs. Looker, arranging the curls of fair hair that clustered round her face. "I sha'n't get very expensive mourning,

dear. You are not worth it," she continued, archly looking up at him.

The Colonel laid down his cigar and kissed her.

CHAPTER III.

A NEWSPAPER CUTTING.

THE *Morning Post* of Friday, September 2nd, 1887, contained the following announcement:—

"We regret to state that yesterday afternoon Lieut.-Col. Looker, late 12th Hussars, died very suddenly at his residence at Hampstead. The gallant officer served with distinction throughout the Mutiny, was twice wounded, and twice mentioned in despatches. The cause of death was *angina pectoris*. Dr. Harper, of Hampstead, having attended him for a previous attack of the same complaint, no inquest was deemed necessary. The funeral will take place at Rutland Park Cemetery, at noon on Tuesday next."

CHAPTER IV.

A SPOILT LUNCHEON.

ON the day after Colonel Looker's funeral, Sir Samuel Baigent drove into Lombard Street in a very bad temper. He wanted to be down in Norfolk amongst the birds, like all other country gentlemen, and here he had been kept in town by this meeting about the coal and wine dues, to see his speech made fun of in *The Daily News* after all his self-denial. "The world is coming to an end; hang me, if it isn't," said he. Yet he betrayed a keen interest in the business of his Bank that morning, for all his belief in the approaching terrestrial catastrophe.

At eleven o'clock a modest knock sounded on the panel of the door of his private room.

"Come in," he shouted. "What is it, young man?" asked he, as Skelton hesitated inside the door. "Why don't you go to Mr. Dawson?"

"I want to speak to you, Sir Samuel, if you will allow me, about an estate in which I am interested as executor."

"Well," said the great man, impatiently; "go on, sir, if you please."

"It is the estate of Colonel Looker, a friend of mine, who was interred yesterday. He has left a widow, and the only provision for her we can discover is a Life Policy in the Eagle for ten thousand pounds. There is no ready money, and I thought if the Bank could arrange to let us have a loan on the Policy, it might help her till the time when the Eagle people will pay——"

"Has she no friends?" interrupted Sir Samuel.

"No, sir; nobody in this country. Her people are all in India."

"Don't like widows without friends," snapped the banker; "always take you in if they can."

"You ought to know very well, Skelton," he continued, "that an application of this kind ought to be made through the family solicitor."

"But she hasn't got one, sir."

"Well, any respectable lawyer will act. See one, and let him communicate with us on the subject."

Skelton was going, when Sir Samuel sharply called him back. "What is this?" he asked, taking up a paper—"What is this about James Carrick's account? He has written for his pass-book, expecting, he says, to find a cheque paid to his brother Henry, whilst there is no reference to such a cheque in Henry Carrick's account, and the book cannot be found. Dawson says you are the clerk who had to do with the matter."

Skelton said he would try to find out all about it.

"Let Dawson have the full explanation of it this afternoon. It is most annoying having any complain

from anybody; as if Baigent's were one of those muddling joint-stock affairs."

Skelton retired with his heart in his mouth.

Sir Samuel rang his bell. "Ask Mr. Dawson to step here," he said to the clerk.

"A loan has been applied for on Life Policy for ten thousand on Colonel Looker, who died last week. Have inquiries made at once at the Eagle Office, that we may have proper information when the solicitor comes."

Sir Samuel Baigent wrote a letter or two, and then waddled off to the Gresham Club.

If your occupation lies in the city, you know already—if your occupation does not, then I will tell you—that if you want to eat a steak, grilled as it only can be in the city of London, you should go to Baker's in Change Alley. Time was when Willis, friendliest of waiters and staunchest of teetotallers—you city men will recollect him well—came up as you took your seat in the cramped little box, and fired off at you the bill of fare: "Corned-beef, sir, roast-loin-o'-mutton—kidney-puddin'—veal-pie—chicken-an'-'am—roast-pork—steaks-and-chops—duck-an'-green-peas, sir." And when he brought your order, you feasted as your London ancestors feasted in the days when Messrs. Pickwick, Snodgrass, Tupman, and Winkle sought adventures. How many good stories have you not heard in which Irving and Toole and Sothern were actors in private life, and "Baker's" was the scene? Willis could have told you if they were true. I can't.

Enter the narrow doorway, descend the passage—a step lower than the court outside—and go into the crowded little room where men of the year of grace 1888 eat their luncheon after the fashion and amidst the surroundings of sixty years ago. They eat with their hats on, these city men; they have not gone there to be idle; it is "one done, another come on." The plates are the real genuine willow-pattern;—Baker's crockery must be valuable nowadays. Ancient cruet-stands and

black-handled knives decorate the board. It is all very old-fashioned; but, take that vacant seat, order a "small steak" and potatoes—they will bring the potatoes on a funny little oval dish—"a pint of bitter in a pot with a spout, and a long glass," and you shall feast as you can do nowhere else.

Into this room Skelton made his way and ate in sulky perturbation. He was in the middle of his luncheon, when a loud and cheery voice proceeding from the next compartment smote upon his ear.

"The best of it is the conceited fool never was across a horse in his life. How on earth Skelton has the cheek to show himself to his people at home in those breeches and spurs, when they know he hasn't even so much as a Jerusalem pony to ride, I can't guess."

Skelton's fork stopped in the air, half-way to his mouth. He knew that voice well. It belonged to a bright, healthy, good-looking young fellow in the same office as himself: Charles Edward Bowman, a lad of twenty, admired by his companions, quite a hero amongst them, for did he not row three in the London eight at Henley? He lived in lodgings hardly a stone's throw from the dwelling of the Skelton family.

The voice rang out above the clatter and bustle of the room, every word distinct. "If you had seen him two or three Saturdays ago, you fellows, you would have had fits. There he was, brown velveteen coat, with cords and gaiters. It hadn't been raining for a week, and the beggar must have manufactured some mud in the back garden and splashed himself with it on purpose. Going along and crooking his knees out every step as if he was a cavalry officer. Notice the way he's had his hair cut lately? Well, that's the little game at present. He was marching about with the wife of a captain or colonel or something he's sweet on just now. This is the kind of thing, you know."—Here an imitation, which produced a roar of laughter, was evidently being given.

Skelton laid down his fork with the untasted morsel upon it. A fat, elderly looking man in broadcloth

opposite grunted, "They seem to be taking their fun out of somebody, over there."

Skelton made no reply.

Another voice asked a question. "I say, Bowman, what sort of people does he belong to?"

"Oh, he's got a mother, and a sister who is about the nastiest old maid in Hampstead. People call her 'Nasty Skelton,'—her name's Anastasia. They live in a little house, and make believe to belong to the aristocracy."

"The fellow has a different line every time he gets a new suit of clothes. Last year he was by way of being an artist—big soft hat on one side, and the same velveteen coat."

"I know," said the other voice. "That was when he let his hair grow. I say, couldn't we take a rise of some sort out of him? Get a letter written from the lady asking him to meet her at some railway station. He'll think she wants to run away with him. We'll be there and score off him." Here the party rose and took their departure.

Skelton gobbled up the remainder of his luncheon in a towering rage. "You'll take a rise out of me, will you, Master Bowman? I expect you're wrong there," thought he. "I'll be even with you, see if I don't."

All that afternoon he was in a greater state of trepidation than ever. He had troubles on his mind. Carrick's forty pounds, the hitch with the Colonel's policy, were great anxieties; but his anger against Bowman put them quite into the background.

He devised a scheme before he left the office by which he could, at a blow, revenge himself on Bowman and get rid of his difficulties. But it was a scheme with a weak place in it. Instead of going from Broad Street as usual, he walked home that afternoon in order to think it over. As the result, he decided to carry out part of his scheme. Why should he peril his liberty for Mrs. Looker's smiles? Why not leave the inanimate Colonel to his fate? Why should he pay back that money—why pay anybody? Why not go to the States? He turned into a stationer's and bought a Bradshaw.

"Now, Robert," cried his mother, when he arrived at home; "you're an hour late: there is no time to lose if we are to be at 'The Hollies' by seven."

She was a lady with a sharp nose like Robert's, and a wonderful power of saying unpleasant things. Always grumbling, and never saying a good word for anybody.

"I don't intend to go, mother; you'll have to make excuses for me."

"Don't intend to go? I suppose you're going again to that widow at Livadia Lodge?"

Robert did not answer.

"Well, you can tell her I do not intend to call upon her. I am not going to take *my* daughter into doubtful society."

"Robert is in love with the lady," tittered his sister. "He is getting quite talked about."

"Well, Anastasia, as for getting talked about, I heard you spoken of in a public dining-room to-day, loud enough for twenty people to hear, as 'that old maid, Nasty Skelton, at Hampstead.'"

Robert did not wait to see the effect of his shot, but banged the door and left the house.

In a couple of hours he returned and pondered over his Bradshaw.

"Yes, that would just do. Waterloo, 12.25. North German Lloyd's steamship *Eider*. New York's the place," he muttered to himself. "Time to do the trick, pay the passage at Charing Cross, and get to the station."

"I'll come back here for my things, and say the Bank has sent me to Liverpool on business; that will put them on the wrong scent. What a sell for Master Bowman and the Colonel and all the rest. They won't forget me for a long time."

Skelton locked himself into his room, and made a selection from his wardrobe. The breeches and spurs were not forgotten. "I shall want them out West," said he.

He packed a small portmanteau, and hid it under the bed.

Then he searched in the drawers of his mother's writing-table and found a large envelope; this he filled with blank sheets of paper, and addressed in the hand, as nearly as he could imitate it, of the chief cashier:

“Geo. Stacpoole, Esq.—”

“Stop,” he thought, “we must have the name of a ship on it. What will do, I wonder?”

He hunted up a newspaper—“*Tartar, Aruwimi*; clipper sailing vessel, *Potosi*.”

“The *Potosi* will start at noon to-morrow from the basin of Sion Dock for Pernambuco.”

“Well, that might do. He would never think that a man like Stacpoole would only go by steamer. And the time suits so well. Yes, that is it,” and he completed the address—

“Geo. Stacpoole, Esq.,
Potosi,
 Sion Dock.”

“Pity the envelope hasn't the Bank stamp on it; but he won't think of that till the business is done. Now I'm off to bed with a bad headache.”

Thus Robert Wentworth Skelton concocted a scheme, a diabolical scheme for the undoing of another. Follow out his scheme, and read how his sin found him out.

After a sleepless night, spent in going over his difficulties and reviewing his plan for deliverance from them, Skelton betook himself after breakfast to the telegraph office instead of to the railway station, and despatched the following message:—

“To Messrs. Baigent and Co.,
 Lombard Street.

“Am suffering from neuralgia and unable to go out. Will come to Bank if better in course of day—Skelton.”

He had still an hour at his disposal, which he spent in walking part of the way towards Westminster, where he finally arrived about ten o'clock.

Keeping a sharp look-out as he traversed several streets, his eye lighted at last upon the person of whom he was search—a young man just emerging from one of the banking-houses at the top of Parliament Street.

CHAPTER V.

ON BOARD THE "POTOSI."

IN the year 1866, the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, presented the Reverend Edward Bowman to the living of Cottisham, worth then about two hundred and fifty pounds a year. This presentation was, to its recipient, some compensation for the great disappointment of his life. He had himself hoped to be one of that galaxy of demigods—the Fellows of Trinity; but the fates, otherwise the examiners of the Classical Tripos, had willed differently. He was only top of the second class; therefore the fellowship was out of the question. He took Orders and a curacy; and in a few years time, having interest in his college, he was presented to one of the smaller livings in its gift.

He married the daughter of a neighbouring rector, but in two years he was a widower with a son a few months old.

This son, he determined, should achieve the success he had toiled after in vain. He educated him himself. The lad was a youth of promise, tall and straight and strong, with a sound mind in a sound body. On the eve, however, of the minor scholarship examinations at Trinity, the father was found dead in his chair early one Sunday morning, and Charles Edward Bowman had to go out into the world to earn his bread.

With no more than a bare hundred pounds as his

inheritance, and being too young to become a tutor, he followed the advice of the Squire of Cottisham.

“My banking account is,” said Mr. Nugent, “as you perhaps know, Charles, kept by Baigent and Company. For the present, I think the best thing you can do will be to allow me to make interest with them to get you taken into their house. I will be your security.”

“You can then make yourself acquainted with the prospects in business life of a young man situated as you are; and, when you are a year or two older, will be able to decide upon your future course. Meanwhile you will gain experience and insight which will prove valuable to you.”

The youth did not know what else he could do. He had no near relations to advise him. Therefore he accepted Mr. Nugent’s proposal, and entered upon the prosaic life of a banker’s clerk. Fond of athletics, his love of the river kept him out of mischief in summer; and in winter-time his books preserved him from the temptations that beset young men in London.

After two years of city life, he was as whole-souled and as cleanly-minded as he had been in the ivy-covered Cambridgeshire vicarage.

But he was still only a junior clerk. His duty each morning was to go round a certain circuit of Banks and Discount Houses, collecting bills and cash, and, placing them in a wallet chained to his waist, to bring them to the office in Lombard Street at the end of his round.

On the eighth of September, destined to be the most momentous day of his life, he had completed his Westminster circuit when he was met by Skelton on the steps of Durnford’s Bank.

“I’ve been seeking you everywhere for the last three quarters of an hour,” said the latter. “I have been sent to finish the circuit instead of you, and to tell you to take a cab and deliver this to Mr. Stacpoole—you know him—on board the ship *Potosi* in the basin of Sion Dock. You will take his receipt for it, and bring it to the Bank. You have no time to lose; the vessel

sails for Pernambuco this morning, and Mr. Stacpoole goes with her."

Bowman looked at the envelope and saw it was addressed in the cashier's hand. Without a word he divested himself of his wallet and handed it to Skelton. Jumping into a passing hansom, he was on his way in a moment.

As soon as the cab disappeared, Skelton sought the office of North German Lloyd's. Five minutes completed his business there. He called another cab, and ordered the driver to hasten to Hampstead. Arrived at home, he was met by Anastasia.

"Oh! Robert, how did you know?" she asked. "The telegram came only half an hour ago."

"What telegram?"

"Saying Uncle Gerald is dead. I thought you knew, as you have come back. You are wanted at Stanmore at once."

Skelton rushed upstairs, and ripping open the wallet, possessed himself of a handful of gold. If he had thought for an instant he would have kept it intact. But it is not everybody who can think what ought to be done at such flurried moments. Throwing the wallet with the rest of its contents into a drawer, he locked it hastily and went to catch the train for Edgware.

On arriving at the house he was met by an obsequious person who announced himself as his late uncle's confidential man of business. "There is, I have reason to know, no will," said he, "and you are the heir-at-law to the real property. There is personalty besides—a great deal of it, I should say."

Here was a predicament! Skelton had just committed a great crime. *Almost a millionaire, he was in danger of penal servitude.* His mind was made up in a moment. He must go after Bowman and stop him before he returned to the Bank from his fool's errand. Together they would contrive a story that should account for the rifled wallet. "Fifty pounds—a hundred pounds? Yes, Bowman would surely help him for a hundred pounds."

He reached the Dock. It was not yet two o'clock, and the tarrying *Potosi* was still at the wharf. He climbed on board, and then beheld a sight which, ghastly though it was, yet filled him with satisfaction.

The barque *Potosi*, Foster master, had early that same morning hauled out of the dock, and was lying in the tidal basin stern on to the dock-gates, with but one or two other vessels near her.

As Bowman passed along the wharves seeking the ship, picking his way over railway lines and coils of rope, skipping out of the road of hogsheads and bales from the ends of the earth discharging from this vessel or from that, he felt in a new world. Accustomed though he was to the din of the city's traffic, the bustle of the dock yet confused him. When, however, he entered the basin, all there was comparatively quiet. A short calm, as it were, before these ocean-cleaving fabrics should meet the onset of the rushing waves.

The bow of the *Potosi* was hove up high above the wharf; here and there a man leaning against her bulwarks looked idly down on the few bystanders, for the cargo was stowed, the stores on board, and the embarkation of the passengers had hardly yet begun.

"Mr. Stacpoole on board?" called Bowman, looking up in the face of one of the men.

"Stacpoole? Don't know nothin' about him. Better come aboard and go aft and ask the stooard."

Bowman made his way to where a kind of short broad step-ladder leant against the *Potosi's* side. Climbing over the bulwarks, he descended another similar ladder into the waist.

He saw a man standing beside an open hatchway, and asked for the steward.

"I'm the steward, sir," said the man. He knew at a glance that Bowman could not be a passenger. Men don't set out for South America in tall hats, and without any baggage.

"I want to see Mr. Stacpoole, one of the pas-

sengers. I have an important letter for him, which I must deliver myself."

"Don't remember any such name down in the list, sir. There's the captain; we'll ask him."

A fair-haired man had come out of the saloon, and was standing bareheaded under the break of the poop.

"Stacpoole? No," he replied; "but you'd better wait; there are one or two empty cabins, and sometimes passengers do not book till just before we sail." He looked along the deck, and went back into the saloon again, leaving Bowman to his own devices.

He had never been on board a ship before, yet he was filled with the romance of the sea: as what young member of our Viking race is not?—thanks to those great marine writers the like of whom no other nation can boast. He even knew something about the parts of a ship. He threw his head back, and gazed aloft at the tapering spars, recognizing the lubber's holes in the tops, and tracing each brace and stay, the breeze from the river playing on his face the while. He looked down the hatchway, and saw a woman and a child or two, already quite at home on the main-deck below.

Then cabs began to rattle up, and porters miraculously appeared. From the first cab there stepped a burly man in blue serge, with the broadest shoulders Bowman ever saw. Clear dark eyes glittered over his brown beard. Big as he was, a certain alertness characterised his movements.

"A regular sea-dog, a man from Devon whose forefather sailed with Drake," thought Bowman, looking at the stranger with interest.

A mistake, Bowman; he is a quiet Pernambuco merchant with a scientific turn, going back to his home in the Caixa, after his triennial holiday, with a brand new equipment of scientific instruments in those cases he shouts to the rough porters to handle carefully.

"Quietly with that now," he says; "that's my

With speculum," as a square box is handed over the side.

Bowman saw the name of "Rundell" painted on the case.

Whilst the new-comer was busy with his boxes, a string of cabs arrived, each full of men, young and strong and bronzed; and each man looking like a second mate.

"What can she want with so many officers?" Bowman asked himself, as these men, unmistakable sailors this time, jumped from their vehicles and paid their cabmen. No porters ran forward to meet them. Each carried his luggage for himself, across his shoulder, in a long white canvas bag like a bolster, as he came aboard, and made his way forward, where he disappeared.

Those are not officers, but the crew. There is no dungaree about these fellows; they wear good pilot-cloth and serge. There is no grease on their comfortable clothing; each man's boots shine as if he was going to church with his old mother on the first Sunday after a twelvemonth's voyage.

Sailors do not all come aboard in rags and tatters, and are not all Dutchmen; as you know well, Mr. Clark Russell. Still these are picked men, the cream of their profession. Teetotallers half of them. Men with money in their pockets, and cigars in their mouths as they drive up.

Peep, as Bowman did in defiance of sea etiquette, into the top-gallant forecastle, through its half-open sliding door, and you will see them changing their good clothes, and putting them carefully away in the bottoms of their chests. See that fellow squatting on the beam that runs across the deck, thrusting his feet into a pair of well-greased high-lows in place of the shiny boots he came aboard in. These sailor-men are even careful of their clothes.

More cabs drive up, but no Mr. Stacpoole. A black-bearded man, with engineer written all over him, walks leisurely up with a cigar in his mouth.

"What can they do with an engineer on board a sailing ship?" asks Bowman of the scientific merchant, who was leaning over the bulwarks at his side.

"Take him to Pernambuco. That man is going to be an engine-driver on our new railway. Half a dozen of them and their wives are going out in the second class. We pay their passage, and give them three hundred a year each. I know, because I hired them. I am one of the directors."

"Have you made many voyages?" Bowman inquired.

"This is my thirteenth," was the reply, with which the merchant fell into conversation.

The stranger was a man with an imagination, and guessed, to Bowman's amusement, at the history of the various groups who were now standing about the deck.

"See yonder young fellow, about your own age, smoking the new meerschaum? He is annoyed because his father—the old squire there beside him—has not shelled out more handsomely. It is bad enough to be sent to the other side of the world out of the way of blue-eyed Nelly the village beauty, without being stinted, and having to go on a sailing vessel where there's no American bar. Look, he will hardly speak to the poor old boy, who is doing his best for him. He is going out to be a cattle farmer, and in three months' time will be glad to be a butcher's man.

"Then there is that young man with his sweetheart at the other side of the mast. She has come with her people to see him off. They are kissing each other's tears away."

"Poor things," said Bowman, who had a sympathetic heart in him, and did not quite relish this amusement at genuine grief; "it's rather a pity to laugh at them, isn't it?"

"Oh, you'll see him lively enough when we get out into blue water; unless the young squire there wins too many of his half-crowns."

"I sha'n't see him. I am only here to deliver a letter to a passenger who has not yet arrived, and nobody knows anything about."

"You'd better come into the saloon with me, and look round for him there; we sha'n't be long now before we start. The man with the chronometers has just come on board. Though what they have that hatchway open down there for, I can't guess—unless indeed there is more cargo to come yet."

Bowman looked down into the open hold. Sacks were piled in heaps; railway-carriage wheels and axles stood in pairs; ploughs, fragments of machinery, lay in the deep womb of the ship.

They entered the saloon, and the merchant questioned the steward, who was bustling about. Bowman stood and looked around. There was a brave old woman over seventy, leaving her native land probably for ever, with her daughter and her son-in-law. Little children were playing, and a smart maid or two flaunted in and out of the state rooms. A poor half-witted gentleman, brother to the lady with the pretty child and son of the older one, was prowling about. Suddenly there was a heavy fall, a shriek; and whilst some hurried to a large square hole abaft the great table—open for the reception of passengers' luggage—others led the ladies into the cabins, and shut the doors on them. It was plain there had been an accident of some kind, and the women had to be got out of the way. The steward called out—

"It is a lady who has fallen down."

Bowman and the rest looked over the edge in fear of some dreadful sight—for after the first scream all was still. They beheld, not a mangled corpse, but the poor half-witted gentleman, painfully climbing up over the heap of luggage, looking up in a comical manner, with the brim of his hat hanging round his chin, and the skin scraped off his nose.

"Fallen down and bonnetted himself," said the merchant, when the roar of laughter that followed so quickly the gasp of apprehension subsided. "If it had

been anybody else it would have knocked his brains out."

They went on deck again. Still no Stacpoole appeared, and Bowman was thinking of going ashore to stand near the vessel till she left, when a barge drew alongside. Mr. Rundell and Bowman looked over the port bulwarks.

"So this is what we've been waiting for!" said the former. "Cement, by all that's beautiful!"

Quickly the slings were flung into the barge, and half a dozen casks secured in them. The rope was passed round a beam of wood chained to the hatchway, and bits of its fibre flew off like smoke, as the sailors hoisted away.

Just then Bowman thought he saw a man like the longed-for Stacpoole, standing on the wharf. He took a step aft to get a better look at him, clear of the star-board main shrouds, when the great bundle of casks came on board with a rush, and caught him just above the right ear. There was a warning shout, but it came too late; and the poor fellow was cast half across the deck, a mangled mass.

"Dead!" cried the steward with a white face, falling on one knee beside him.

Mr. Rundell knelt down too. "No, he is not quite dead; but he can hardly live. His skull must be completely smashed in, and his scalp is half torn off."

"Don't you think he will live?" asked an anxious voice behind him—a voice that sounded as if the anxiety was lest he should recover.

"No; I don't."

"Thank God," said Skelton to himself.

"Does any one know who he is? Is he one of the passengers?" asked the first mate, who stood in the little crowd that had immediately gathered round the sufferer.

The captain answered, "No, he's not a passenger; he came on board to see a Mr. Somebody or other, who was not on the list, and I don't think has appeared. See if anybody like that has come on board, Mr. Smithson."

"No, sir. There are no people here not entered," replied the mate, coming back again.

"Feel in his pockets then, Mr. Smithson." No letters or cards, not a scrap of paper indicating name or address was found.

"We must send him to hospital, that's plain," said Captain Foster. "It is likely to be a serious matter. Somebody who witnessed the accident ought to stay behind."

On inquiry, no one except Mr. Rundell owned to having seen what had exactly taken place.

"I think I saw enough," said Skelton, coming forward, "to be able to say how it occurred."

"Who are you, sir?" asked the captain.

"I merely came on board ten minutes ago out of curiosity."

Mr. Rundell professed himself utterly unable to postpone his voyage. But he made a proposition, which seemed to be a way out of the difficulty.

"How soon do you really start, Captain?"

"Not for another hour, I am afraid," was the answer.

"Very well, then the best thing to be done will be for him to be taken on board the tug; and if you can go with him, sir," turning to Skelton, "the tug will run up to near St. Lawrence's in twenty minutes. It will be better than jolting him over these stones down here, and I will be answerable for the tug's charges."

On arriving at the hospital, Skelton professed to know as little as possible of the cause of the accident. Bowman was taken into the ward, and seen almost immediately by Sir Thomas Steptoe, who chanced to be in the building.

An extensive fracture of the skull was discovered. Sir Thomas at once endeavoured to raise the pieces of depressed bone; but gave it as his opinion that there was next to no hope.

Skelton proceeded to the Bank and asked to see one of the partners. He did not intend to say anything about Bowman. He knew better, he thought. His victim was sure to die, and his memory must bear the

blame for the missing wallet. He merely explained that he had received news that he had inherited a large fortune, and wished to be relieved immediately of his duties at the Bank.

This was at once acceded to.

He then returned to Hampstead, where his coming had been anxiously expected for some hours.

It was some days before he was able to assure himself as to Bowman's chance of life. Meanwhile, he searched the newspapers for an account of the accident. There was none. How easy it is for any one in this great London to be entirely lost to sight.

On the following Monday Skelton called at the hospital. The porter told him the patient had died that afternoon. The house-surgeon, crossing the entrance hall at the time, caught something of the words of the inquiry, and sent the porter to overtake him.

"I understand," he said, "you can give us some information as to this strange case. The man is unfortunately dead, and there will have to be an inquest. Can you kindly oblige me with your name and address? You will be required as a witness."

"Certainly; I have no card with me, but my name is John Corbett, Broadway, Hammersmith."

The porter took it down.

"You will no doubt hear from the coroner's officer, Mr. Corbett," said the doctor, "when the inquest will take place."

Skelton bowed and withdrew.

The coroner's officer was unable to find John Corbett; and, after opening the inquiry, the coroner adjourned it for three days.

When the court again met, this important witness was not forthcoming. The house-surgeon and nurses having made their depositions on the previous occasion, after hearing Sir Thomas Steptoe's evidence and that of the porter, the coroner briefly addressed the jury. A verdict was returned to the effect, that the unidentified deceased had died from fracture of the skull, but how the injuries were received "there was no evidence to show."

The coroner duly certified for the burial of the body. Thus a young man disappeared from the world leaving not a single trace.

Meanwhile Baigent and Company had communicated with the police. A warrant for Bowman's apprehension was taken out. Descriptions were telegraphed to Liverpool and Hull, and all the principal ports; they were cabled to America, and to the Cape. It was a plain case of absconding with the moneys of the firm. The culprit was traced to Durnford's, where he had received some very important securities. The numbers of notes and bonds were advertised in the daily papers; every step was taken; a large reward was offered; a minute account of the circumstances of the robbery, so far as they were known, was entered in the police register. "No stone," said the Criminal Investigation Department, "had been left unturned." Except this, ye astute inspectors, you made no inquiries at the hospitals, so sure were you that it was a case of felony.

That good name, blessed in his father's time by the poor of Cottisham, was branded with infamy.

Charles Edward Bowman, the son guarded with such careful solicitude; the solace of his parent's grief-stricken heart, the object of so many fond hopes; the source of so much pride—the wrongly suspected Dead—was hunted for *as a robber* in two continents.

"I thank Heaven," cried Mr. Nugent, when Sir Samuel Baigent informed him in his private room of what had occurred, "that I saw his father in his grave before this happened. Whatever his lot in life had been, the son who could do this deed would surely have brought down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

BOOK II.

BURIED ALIVE.

CHAPTER VI.

“A BOX O’ BONES.”

EAST, west, north, south, all around London, may be found those gardens of the dead where the men and women who have fought their fight have been laid to rest after the turmoil of the mighty City’s strife. Some of these Elysian fields are undeniably ugly, crowded everywhere with those great blocks of stone which heirs and legatees pile above the departed, as though to make sure of their coming back no more to claim the worldly goods they left behind them in their flight.

But here and there are grounds with shaven lawns and many-hued parterres, with leafy boughs whispering in the wind—such as dying Stonewall Jackson may have fancied he beheld, when he murmured, “Let us cross over the river and rest under the shadow of the trees.”

How different from the London habitations of the dead sixty years ago—hemmed-in churchyards, places which Charles Dickens called “a shameful testimony to future ages how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together!”

But it is not poetry, it is business, that has arranged

these gardens in place of the poisonous churchyards. They are administered by Burial Boards greedy for fees ; by committees of Vestries with fixed ideas about commissions and contracts ; by advertising companies that declare good dividends.

The cemetery at Rutland Park is perhaps the best kept and the prettiest near London. Read the regulations on the notice-board at the entrance, and you will be satisfied that nothing can ever take place there to outrage the sentiments of surviving friends. Yet strange things happen in these places.

If you were a poor widow, unable to *buy* a grave for your dead child, you would, at its funeral, be treated by the elderly grave-digger with considerate sympathy. He would take charge of your little bunch of roses, and assure you he would be certain to lay them upon the little mound when all was over. He would pull out his own private note-book, and hand you a leaf of it inscribed with the number of your dear one's grave, so that you might know its exact place. You would, no doubt, return and plant the grave of your dead with primroses and daisies, and water them with your tears. But, alas ! if you only knew it, no sooner had you walked away, than that sympathetic sexton called an earth-stained labourer, the little coffin was hauled up again to the surface, and carried to a great pit, where lay a dozen more packed and fitted tightly together.

The company cannot afford you a separate grave, poor mother, unless you buy it in perpetuity. Therefore you were provided for the occasion with a show grave, a dummy grave that served for a score of funerals or more the same week. Perhaps it does just as well for you, so long as you never know it.

But what of this rusty shabbyhearse with no mourners following it behind ? It is driven rapidly up the main avenue. The brisk superintendent steps out of his office.

" Another box o' bones, Henry ? " he inquires of the driver.

" Yes, Mr. Mudge. Here's the certificate, name of

Jane Thompson," and the man hands him down a crumpled paper.

"All right, drive on—same place as last," and the superintendent rings a bell, as the sorry horse is whipped up for the last stage of its journey.

The sexton meets it, and from the recesses of the hearse a long rough box is taken. It is made apparently of the materials of some disused old packing-case, and smeared over with coal-tar. Its joints gape. It seems to give in the middle the moment it is handled.

You would guess it contained the mortal coil of some unfriended pauper. It in reality contains the fragments of a dozen.—What becomes of those who die in the hospitals unknown and unclaimed? After an interval during which things occur that you and I, since we want to sleep to-night undisturbed by horrible dreams, will not endeavour to pry into, this is what becomes of them:

John Hampden Mudge, porter of St. Lawrence's Hospital, packs a box once a fortnight or so, and sends it to his brother Oliver Cromwell Mudge, cemetery keeper at Rutland Park. The porter has kept on a file the medical or coroner's certificates of the unknown dead. He picks off the first he comes to. It is intended by the law for one only, but it will serve for half a score. He sends it off with the coffin.

Yet John Hampden Mudge and Oliver Cromwell his brother are neither of them wretches. John is a kind husband, and Oliver a good father. Both of them love Olive, Oliver's motherless daughter: and she, innocent and pure and beautiful, loves them dearly in return. No one handles a sufferer more tenderly than John, as he receives the maimed victim of an accident at St. Lawrence's gate. And Oliver—he of the hard name—so brisk, so wide-awake in his dealings with the tribe of undertakers, weeps tears of sentiment when his daughter sings her simple songs in the snug parlour of an evening. You ask of either of them, as Hamlet asked of his grave-digger, "Has this fellow no feeling of his business?" Horatio's answer is the true one, "Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness."

The sexton and his mate took what purported to be the remains of the late Jane Thompson, and laid them without much ceremony in an open trench. In fact one end of the box was let down with a thud.

"Chaplain's gone," said the underling. "See'd him off 'alf an hour ago."

"We'll leave it there till to-morrow then," observed the head grave-digger.

The chaplain, good easy man, did not see the use of reading the service in the chapel to nobody, over what was called Jane Thompson, which might be Jane and John and Joseph for aught he knew. "Earth to earth," the Lord's Prayer, and a collect at the grave-side, in his opinion met the case, and earned him his regulation fee.

The box was therefore left uncovered in the trench till the reverend man should find time next day to scramble through his makeshift office.

Two hours later, Sam Fountain, the second grave-digger, returned. It was September, and by seven o'clock it was almost dark. He made for one particular corner of the cemetery where was a plum-tree which Samuel considered to be his own. It was now weighed down with ripening fruit. Mindful of what had happened in other years, Sam was there to protect his tree from spoliation.

He was a character in his way, with a theory of his own on the uselessness of cleanliness.

"No," said he to himself, as he sat on a grave-mound and prepared to fill his pipe, "if I had my time to go over again I wouldn't marry a clean woman. Not for nobody nor nothen'. They're the uncomfortablest, naggingest, upsettingest wives any poor chap can marry. It's 'Sam, mind that floor,' and 'Sam, keep away from that table,' and 'Sam, for goodness' sake scrape yourself if you won't wash,' every time I go near the 'ouse. If I warn't a converted man I could 'a found in my 'eart to kill 'er to-night with the coal hammer. The Lord's will be done."

"Let's see now, there was a bushel an' a 'alf o' them plums last 'ear, an if it hadn't 'a been for them thieving boys, there 'ad 'a been twice as many. It oughtn't to be for northen' as I got 'em to plant fat old mother Webster at the foot o' this 'ere tree last Christmas. There ought to be more nor five bushels, two for the minister, and three to sell. An' I'll bury the money; she may feel i' my pockets and welcome this time."

Sam smoked on in silence for a few minutes, when it occurred to him it would be a stroke of generalship to go fifty yards or so farther from the tree. "I'll wait till they're climbin' up, and ketch 'em in the hact and make 'em pay," he muttered.

Accordingly he withdrew to the neighbourhood of the hospital trench. As he approached it, he heard a strange snorting sound. "A dog in the cimet'ry, as I'm alive! Where can 'e be?"

The noise evidently proceeded from the open trench. Sam made his way up to it, falling over a grave as he went. Sure enough, there was the sound coming up from the bottom of the untidy excavation. He peered down into it, but could see nothing. He struck a match; the wind extinguished it in a moment. Still, he saw enough to know that there was nothing there but the black box. It was evidently thence that the sound proceeded, a sound like the stertorous breathing of one in an apoplectic fit. Sam was now thoroughly frightened. If he had not known it to be "a box of bones," hundreds of which he had helped to inter, he would have thought some one had been buried alive. He started off for the superintendent's house, and found Mr. Mudge tuning his violin.

"Come at once, sir!" he cried. "Send I may never if there ain't something wrong in plot thirty-seven."

Mr. Mudge laid down his fiddle; he would not have thrown it down if the crack of doom had sounded. He loved it, therefore he laid it down gently. He called for the bull's-eye lamp and hurried with Sam to the spot.

"It's somebody alive, buried by mistake. Run for the ropes," he shouted.

Sam procured them directly, and then hesitated ; he felt like running away.

"What are you shaking there for ? Jump in," cried the superintendent.

Sam didn't half like it, but in he went, Mudge holding the light over the edge.

The man was fumbling at the box ; Mudge was too impatient to wait longer, and dropped into the grave himself.

"Here, hold this end up, and I'll slip the rope underneath," said he.

He was short and fat, and found great difficulty in doing it. An effort, however, and then he managed it.

"Now the other end."

They climbed out, and hauled the box to the surface.

It was not difficult to wrench off the gaping lid. Inside there lay, instead of the students' gruesome handiwork, the breathing body of a young man of about twenty years of age. He was naked, and quite insensible. The eyes were half closed, and from the throat came that indescribable noise characteristic of those who are suffering from some oppression of the brain.

The superintendent scratched his head in amazement.

"Well, here's a nice thing, Sam ! What is to be done ? We can't leave him here. Bring the bier, and we'll wheel him to my house."

The bier was brought, and the box hoisted upon it. Outside the house they stopped. Mudge went in and got the women out of the way into the kitchen, locking them in.

The men staggered with their burden into the room that served for the superintendent's office.

"Now, Sam, not a word to anybody ; in fact you don't go out of this till I know what to do," panted Mudge, mopping his face.

The tenant of the box did not appear to have moved ; the strange breathing continued in full volume.

John's made a mistake at St. Lawrence's, that's

plain. We must have him here at once," thought Mudge.

Sam wanted to go for the doctor.

"No, you just stay here and I'll go and telegraph to the hospital," said the other. "I'll lock you in, and if you make a sound you'll be taken up for murder."

What Sam went through in that twenty minutes with the body, he never could have found words to describe. He stood in the corner as far off it as possible, the gleam from the lantern standing on the floor partially illuminating the ghastly face and heaving chest.

It was an hour after Mudge returned, before his brother came. During the time, the superintendent had hunted up the certificate of Jane Thompson's death.

Twice in the interval he had been to the kitchen door to try to soothe the women, in answer to Olive's scream of "What is it, father?"

When John appeared, his brother began at once.

"You've done it this time; we're in for it now. What have you sent us here? Go outside, Fountain." Fountain left the office and sat on the step outside.

"Well, I tell you, Oliver," said John, "he was dead when I put him into the coffin. Accident case, fracture of the skull; proper inquest and everything. No name, nothing known about him; no marks on his clothes, only an envelope with two large sheets of blank paper in his pocket. Of course he had to go to the dissecting-room. But when I came to put him into the tank, I noticed his arm. Look there! Oliver; it's the same young man that picked up Olive and saved her life. I'm sure of him by that X."

"Well," he resumed, "I couldn't find in my heart that after what he'd done for us, he should be made a subject of. So I just boxed him up, and sent him down here in the usual way. I should have told you all about it the next time I saw you."

"Awkward part of it is, you see, John," said Oliver, "that neither you nor I can say a word about it. If it

got wind, we'd both get the sack, and fifty to one the Board would prosecute for all the fees."

"I don't believe they dare; we know too much," rejoined the porter. "What's the name on the paper?"

"Jane Thompson," replied Oliver, smoothing out the paper. "Can't you go back and get one that would fit?"

"None but the right one would do, as he is alive; we don't know his name. Perhaps he won't come round, and then we can bury him again all right. Let's have another look at him."

The unknown was breathing away as hard as ever.

"No, John," said Oliver; "if he is the man that saved Olive, we'll do what we can for him and chance it. You're quite sure about it?"

"Swear to him anywhere," John answered. "What about Fountain?"

"Oh, I'll talk to him; he's mad against capital punishment—I know what to say. Fetch him in."

"Sam," said Oliver, when the grave-digger entered, "this is a man that committed a murder. He fought the bobby that took him, and got his head bashed in. He was taken to the hospital, and two turnkeys watched him there night and day. But it was no use, he couldn't be cured. They thought he was dead, and so he ought to have been; and my brother sent him here, not liking to have any of him about the place. Here he is, come alive again. If they get him back they'll hang him, so we've settled to keep him here as long as we can and give him a chance for his neck. Take your Bible oath not to say a word about it to a living soul: that long-tongued Missis of yours would send him to the gallows."

"I reads, sir, as the blessed Book says, 'Swear not at all.' There ain't no Bible oaths," said Sam. "In our church o' light we goes again all swearin'. But I'll say, 'The Lord strike me if I makes a mention of it.'"

"Well, that'll have to do. It's swearing all the same," Oliver replied. "Now, you'd better be off, and forget all about it. We will look after him."

"An' you won't let 'em get 'im, sir," pleaded Sam, turning round in the doorway. "Think of his sowl."

"What next, Oliver?" asked John, after the man had left them.

"Well, I'm thinking we'll carry him up into the spare room, and tell Olive you were coming down here, and picked him up in an accident close by. Cab knocked him down, or something of that sort. You must get his clothes, if you can, and bring them here, or there will be questions about that. Then about a doctor: if we have one of the men about here, and this fellow dies, there will be another inquest, and the deuce and all of a mess that we can't get out of. Is there nobody who would hold his tongue that you could bring from St. Lawrence's?"

John considered. "Well, Righton, the second house-surgeon, wouldn't care about anything, so long as it was a queer case. I've done him many a good turn when he wanted preparations. The best way will be to tell him all about it. He's off duty after seven, and if I could find him I dare say he would come to-night. Besides, he's had charge of him already."

"I don't think of anything better than that; but, John, it's risky. Tell him by degrees, and see how he takes it, before you let it all out. If it's all right, get him down to-night, and mind you bring the clothes."

"We'll get him upstairs first," continued Oliver, "and then I'll burn the box whilst you are away."

The difficult problem was thus settled for the moment. The sufferer was carried as quietly as possible upstairs; then Olive and the servant-girl were liberated from the kitchen, and told the story about the cab.

Rescued from the very jaws of the grave. Dying on the threshold of manhood, raised to life again when within the threshold of the tomb. Insensible, unknown, save as one who had once done a good deed. Brought back by a chance from the unseen world, protected by a chance from the knife, which otherwise had surely severed the thread of life worn so thin that Science could not perceive it:—here indeed is the hero of a mystery. If he lives, the time will come when he may take his friend, and, pointing to the spot, say, "There

I lay; that was my grave." But, unless he lives, and lives to tell his tale, those who knew him, not by name, in his half-awakened life—none but they can speak of him, and they can only say: "We took him from the earth in secret, and there, in secret, we laid him again."

CHAPTER VII.

OLIVE.

"TURN him over partly on his face, so that I can get at the back of his head better. There now, that will do."

The speaker was a middle-sized young man, with slight moustache and whiskers, and a forehead prematurely bald. The person addressed was John Hampden Mudge, who, in consequence of his hospital experience, had been installed as assistant to the surgeon he had brought with him.

"I think I know what it is," said the surgeon through half-closed lips, as he occupied himself about the sufferer's head. "There must be a splinter of bone lodged under the skull. Yes, here it is," said he, displaying an almost infinitesimal fragment. "You see this has been pressing into the brain, and some jolt or knock has partly released it. A very little thing to make such a great difference."

"Why, of course the men very likely half-dropped him into the grave. They often are very rough with what we get from the dissecting-room. I'll tell that Sam to be more careful in future, sir," said the superintendent, apologetically.

"So as not to have any more of them coming to life again, eh?" remarked the doctor. "Why, if that has been the case, it is just that knock that has brought him partly round—a mere accident. Your lives and mine depend on little accidents from day to day. You see the splinter was displaced by it, and that relieved the pressure."

"Will he have a chance, do you think, Doctor?" asked Oliver.

"Well, yes, a chance, certainly; but whether he will recover or not, I can't say yet. There; best keep him lying in that position. Give me the sponge."

When the surgeon turned to go, the porter held the door open for him: and as soon as Dr. Righton was across the threshold, John took a step into the apartment, and, bending half across the little room, whispered loudly behind his hand to his brother, "I've made it all right with him; he's a brick, a right 'un by name and nature."

"Now," said the surgeon, "before I leave, I want to see the person who is going to nurse him."

"I am, sir," said a gentle voice. It belonged to a young girl of eighteen, who could at first be scarcely distinguished in the badly lighted room. A girl of a kind no one would have expected to find in such a place. She was fair enough to look upon; her brown hair, drawn back from her face in a fashion not common in these days, contrasted with a delicate yet not unhealthy pallor. But it was the expression that was most striking. Sympathy, alertness, intellectual strength, were evident in the young countenance.

"My niece Olive, sir," said the porter. "Going to be a doctor herself one of these days. This will be her first nursing job."

The doctor looked at her with interest. She did not blush or look self-conscious, as most girls would have done, at being spoken of to a stranger, a young man.

"There is another reason," she said, almost eagerly, "a better reason than that, why I want to do something for him: he saved my life once. Uncle John was with me at the time, and saw it all."

"Oh! then you know who he is," said Dr. Righton. "Who are his friends?"

"No, we know nothing of him," Olive replied. "It was in Charing Cross District Station, a month or two ago. Uncle took me to the theatre one evening——"

"The divine bard, sir," broke in Mudge—he was a Shakespearian enthusiast.

"Irving and Miss Terry," remarked the doctor.

"Irving? No—Wilson Barrett, sir. Irving is 'full of little faults proceeding on distemper'——"

"There, that will do, Mudge," said the doctor. "No time now for the trotting out of your hobby. I want to know about this Charing Cross business."

Olive answered, "A man was holding a carriage-door open as the train came along the platform, and if a young gentleman—uncle says he's sure it's this one—had not got hold of me just in time, I should have been under the train and cut to pieces."

"I knew him again," Mudge broke in, "because of a mark on his arm; he wore those wide shirt-cuffs, and his sleeve slipped up just as he reached out after Olive. You can see the mark to-morrow."

"And so he saved your life, and you want to save his? Well, perhaps we shall between us. But you can't do all the nursing yourself; you must have some one to help you. This will be a night and day business."

"Oh, Sarah and father will help," said Olive.

"And who is Sarah?—Your sister?"

"No, Sarah is the servant."

"The servant; well, I should like to see her, and then I can tell you both together what you have to do."

The porter called out "Sa-rer." Bells were not in use in the Cemetery Lodge.

An immense young woman appeared, thirteen stone at least, with her colossal frame surmounted by a broad red face, in which were two little black eyes, far apart from each other, like the plums in a sailor's Christmas pudding.

The lower half of the giantess was wrapped in an immense flannel apron.

"So you're Sarah?" said Righton.

"Yes—sir" (pronounced in an ascending major third).

"Sarah Splatter, sir."

"And you are going to help Miss Mudge to nurse?"

He smiled, the contrast between the two was so great.

"Yes—sir. I've been a nurse afore. Leastways I was a nurse afore I was a servant; I mean, sir, as I were a servant and a nurse afore I went for a general."

The doctor's smile widened.

"I was nurse to five. Yes—sir, I was, and two on 'em was twins, only one died, an' I've got my aporn, flannin' you see, sir, as I used to wash them children in."

"But this is a man, a sick man, who is to be nursed."

"Yes—sir, that I know. But he'll want to be washed, sir, won't he now? An' I'll be that gentle with 'im as 'e won't give a whimper. I always was."

"Yes, yes, Sarah; but that is not what we want. What is required of you is patient attention. You must sit by him and watch him, and if there is any alteration in him, call Miss Mudge. You will have to see that the room does not get too close, and that his beef-tea and so forth are nicely prepared. Can I trust you to do that, do you think?"

"Yes—sir. I've got the patience of Jeremiah, sir. Never a murmur nor a lament from me, sir, when them twins had the measles ever so. An' as for beef-tea, sir, I knew beef-tea would be wanted, and so I put half of master's supper-steak in the teapot, and its droring beautiful on the range, sir. Master likes onions with his steak, but I didn't put none o' them in it."

"I see, Miss Mudge, you will have to be very vigilant," said the doctor, turning to Olive.

"Sarah will make no mistake, when once she thoroughly understands what she is required to do. I think I can undertake to see that all your instructions are thoroughly carried out."

The doctor gave a few simple directions to Olive, and then, taking her hand, bade her good-night, and drove off with the porter in the cab that brought them.

It was an autumn evening, and Olive stood at the

open casement of the little room wherein lay the frame of the unknown, still steeped in insensibility. Dr. Righton had been down to Rutland Park early in the morning, and found the superintendent sitting by the couch of this waif rescued from the tomb. He had administered an opiate after dressing his wound, saying that it was of the greatest consequence that he should remain for some hours in the state of unconsciousness in which he still was. "It may do much," he remarked, to prevent the fever of which I am afraid."

And now, as Olive, refreshed after the long rest, in which she had turned day into night, looked on the prospect of distant hills and waving woods, lighted up by the setting sun, she asked herself, "Can such strange, tragic things occur as this—this mystery of the grave—in this world that looks so peaceful on this Sunday evening? Ah, life is full of wonderful things, and I shall doubtless meet with many quite as strange in the career I have chosen for myself."

She seated herself at a table whence she could have her patient in view, and took up a book. It was a treatise on botany, which she knew was a science in which the student of medicine must be proficient. It was not exactly from any knowledge of medicine that she had elected to become one of that still small band of medical women. It seemed to her the most useful profession open to a woman. Her father, a lover of music, had had her carefully taught to play on several instruments, but she had done her best to gain skill in music only to please her father. She liked to sing, but she had no real love for instrumental music; it seemed to her an unpractical pursuit. During the last few months she had made herself a learned botanist. She had also made some little way in the study of Latin, thinking that she would overleap that barrier of the dead languages with which men have blocked the avenues to the professions. Besides that, she had pored over the anatomical part of an old copy of Archdeacon Paley's works which Mudge possessed. Otherwise her idea of the medical art was of the vaguest.

As she sat with her head bowed over the page, her mind busy guessing at the life-history of the unknown, Dr. Righton knocked quietly at the door and entered.

He walked up to the bed and raised the patient's eyelid.

"That's better," he said. "There seems no longer to be any pressure. He will probably waken up quite sensible in a few hours, and you must take care how you deal with him if he does. Have that giantess out of the way, or she will scare away his returning senses."

He proceeded to attend to the wound, Olive standing by to hand him what he wanted.

When he had finished he saw she had turned white and sick. He helped her into a chair.

"Why, this will never do, Miss Mudge. Nurses must not faint, or what will become of the patients? Here, drink this." He poured into a glass of water a few drops from a phial he carried in a little pocket-case, and held the draught to her lips.

"I am afraid you'll have to go through a great deal more than that before you are a qualified practitioner, calling me in to a consultation now and then."

"I'm quite recovered now, thank you," Olive said, as he seated himself in the other chair the little room contained.

"I hear," he continued, "that this is a most romantic case. Quite a resurrection. There are so many strange things about it. I've been making inquiries at St. Lawrence's, and there is absolutely nothing we can identify him by except the name Stacpoole on an envelope, with no writing in it, that was found in his pocket. It is quite a chance if the letter was addressed to him or to somebody else. My opinion is, if he had been Stacpoole the letter would have been opened, but it was not. However, I have sent this to *The Times*."

"Important.—Will any friend of Mr. George Stacpoole, connected with the "Potosi" or otherwise, kindly communicate at once with Dr. Righton at St. Lawrence's Hospital?"

"That might produce something," he resumed, as Olive handed him back the paper.

"I should think it would," said she; "but it seems to me to-day as if everything depended on accidents—chances, I mean."

"Well, yes, it is a great chance that he was not killed at the hospital," Righton replied. "By the way, have you ever thought of all that you will have to undergo before you can become qualified? Think of the dissections."

A spasm of horror crossed Olive's face, nevertheless she bravely replied, "But that will cease to be so very dreadful after a time, won't it?"

"In a way," he answered; "but the whole thing, in my opinion, is not the profession for a woman. Quite apart from all the gruesome part of it, and the unpleasant experiences that come to one, it takes away, to my notion, all the best part of a woman's nature. Makes her hard—you have to be cruel to be kind, you know. Now it is different in that respect with the nurses. They have a good deal of very unpleasant work, I grant you, but then their sympathies are called out."

"Ah, that's the way the men talk. Can women not be as sympathetic under all circumstances as men? You are quite content to let us do the nursing and be your subordinates, but you want to keep anything higher for yourselves. I've seen it argued over and over again, Doctor."

"Excuse me; you are quite mistaken there. I don't think you will find medical men as a rule so churlish and selfish as that. I am sorry for the nurses in many ways, knowing what they often have to do, but nursing does not harden them like surgery must do. Take my advice, Miss Mudge, and look before you leap."

"By the way, I want to see this mark on the patient's wrist. Yes, it is rather strange. It has been caused by a burn. His life was saved the day he got that, though he does not know it yet."

"Will he ever know it?" asked Olive.

"I see no reason why he should not. Now I must go. If he should waken up, be careful, whatever you do, not to let him talk till I have seen him."

As Dr. Righton crossed the Strand on his way from the station to St. Lawrence's, he saw, driving down the street towards him, a young man the image of John Corbett of Hammersmith. He was in a hansom, and in evening clothes. Before the doctor quite realized who the man was, the cab had passed him. He, however, took the number on the back of the vehicle, and went towards the hospital considering how he might trace its occupant.

"It is certainly a thing the coroner ought to be interested in, and may be a case for the police," he reflected. "I will see Dr. Whitely on the subject, but I must first consider my position and that of the Mudges in the affair." He walked slowly and thoughtfully along past Trafalgar Square, and up Waterloo Place; where, instead of going into Tichborne Street to the hospital, having now made up his mind, he turned to the left and made for Sackville Street where the coroner lived.

That gentleman was at home. Having a slight acquaintance with Righton, and knowing him better by reputation as the clever house-surgeon of St. Lawrence's, he laid aside his beloved novel and went to him at once.

Righton had decided to say nothing of what had happened since the inquest, except that he had seen Corbett; he could not be mistaken in his man, he felt. Dr. Whitely refreshed his memory from his notes, written in the almost illegible scrawl peculiar to medical coroners, and detested by judges.

"Envelope found," he muttered, "containing two sheets black paper, addressed Stick—no, Stockpot."

"So you think you have seen this missing witness?" he at last remarked, laying down his paper. "Well, you see the inquest is closed. I don't see what I can do to be of any use; you had better go to Scotland Yard. Stay, you will not hear any more of it from them."

No reward or anything. If you can afford it, best go to Pringle, in Essex Street ; it would perhaps cost you a ten-pound note to find out whether it is worth while going into the matter, and then when you have cleared the way the police might take it up."

The surgeon was not a rich man, but still he concluded to risk ten pounds.

Accordingly, next morning he presented himself at the inquiry agent's office.

He was rather curious to see the famous man who had figured in so many celebrated cases when he was at Scotland Yard. He was not quite prepared, however, to see an every-day looking person with a face sparsely covered with a sandy fluff—a man who looked like the branch secretary of a Young Men's Christian Association. The keen eye, the closely shaven face, the confidential manner of Inspector Catchem, all were wanting.

Having ascertained that this was indeed beyond a doubt the redoubtable Pringle, Dr. Righton opened his case. The agent listened in silence, and took a note of the number of the cab. The only thing that made the doctor think him at all equal to his business was the care with which Pringle questioned him as to Corbett's appearance.

Finally he said, "I shall no doubt be able to find out all you want to know, sir, in two or three days, and will drop you a line."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S DISCOVERY.

IN the evening, when his duties at St. Lawrence's were over and his colleague took charge, Righton went down again to Rutland Park ; thinking, as the train hurried along, more about Olive than about his patient.

As he entered the gates of the cemetery, a wan, consumptive man passed him, walking feebly along with-

out any of the spring of health. Though it was a warm evening for September, the invalid was closely wrapped up in a shabby great-coat and wore a half-dirty woollen muffler over his mouth. His shoulders were rounded and bent forward, his chest seemed to have almost disappeared. "There's another victim of phthisis," thought Righton. "What a benefactor the physician would be who could cure that scourge! A morbid notion though, prowling about a burial-ground; perhaps he has been choosing his grave."

Dr. Righton was never more deceived in his life. The man was Pringle; retained on behalf of the Eagle Insurance Company to investigate the case of the late Colonel Looker. He had been to pump the grave-digger and to view the tombstone.

Earlier in the evening he had set out from his office, and had in a moment disguised himself as he left the station. Why he did so he hardly knew himself. As often as not he made inquiries like that he was engaged upon without assuming any disguise at all. It was a mere freak of fancy on his part. When, however, he met the doctor, he congratulated himself on having done so. "Why do hospital surgeons visit cemeteries?" he asked himself. "Surely he is not doing a little business for the medical school with my pious friend. This must be made a note of, Pringle, my boy."

The pious friend was our acquaintance Samuel Fountain, grave-digger and Plymouth Brother; who, an hour before, had noticed this invalid crawling in the evening sunshine from one to another of the seats which a considerate Board had provided for tired or contemplative visitors.

Presently, having filled in the grave on which he was engaged—it will take hours to dig your grave, fair sir, who read this, but it will be comfortably filled up and rammed down and you snug below the daisies and almost forgotten in twenty minutes,—throwing his jacket over his arm and his spade across his shoulder, Sam leisurely made his way towards the sick stranger.

"Fineday it has been," said Pringle, beginning to cough.

"Bless the Lord for that," rejoined Sam. "He maketh 'is sun to shine on the hevil an' on the good, an' then 'e cometh as a thief in the night and taketh men unawares. Is your account made up, my friend?"

"I've got nothing against you that I know of," said Pringle. "I'm not in business."

"Anybody could see as you 'aven't done many day's works lately. Wot I means is, are you ready?"

"Ready for what?"

"Why, to meet the Judge; you'll 'ave to stand afore 'im some day."

"I've stood before the judge a good many times already," thought the inquiry agent; but he said, "You mean that you think I have one foot in the grave, and ought to be thinking of my latter end?"

"I do," replied Sam, "ser'ously thinkin' of it. 'Ave you found peace? Is your 'eart right?"

"It's my lungs," answered Pringle; "but if any one was to say a good word to me it would be a great comfort. I've come from Chelsea to look out a place to lay my bones in, but that other part of me I fear I've thought too little of. Would you mind showing me round a bit?"

"Is yours to be a public or a private grave, sir?" asked Sam, as they walked on together. "Public by the looks on yer."

"No, private. I've a little put by for it, and I'm in a burial club."

"Wot a deal folks does think of their mortle bodies, an' wot a little of their himmortle sows!" Sam exclaimed, as they approached that part of the grounds where the most recent private interments had been made.

"A fit of coughing seized Pringle in the neighbourhood of a very new monument, on which the inscription was not fully completed—

*"Sacred to the memory of Lieut. Colonel Looker,
late 12th Hussars, who died——"*

Sam patted the invalid on the back till he made

him cough in good earnest. When the fit was over they went on, the grave-digger leading the way.

"We shall fill this plot hin about two months. Now if you wos to die before then, you could not be better than 'ere. It's a beautifl gravel sile."

"I think I should like that top corner," said Pringle.

"Well, if yer not over long about it, I makes no doubt but wot yer can 'ave it. Best buy it now, and make sure on it. Let's go anigh the spot an' offer a word o' prayer."

Although he was only gammoning the grave-digger, Pringle felt queer at the idea of praying beside his own grave; still he did not object. He stipulated that the prayer should be short, as he must not stay out late. The prayer, an earnest, genuine one, was offered. As they came away the ex-detective felt as though he had been at his own funeral.

"It's a wonderful thing the power o' prayer," Sam remarked. "I can give you a good sample o' wot it can do. Reglar ripping riving dynamite prayer, I means.

"Me an' my missis wos a movin' to a fresh 'ouse, a matter of a twelvemonth back, an' we 'ad a lot o' things in the cellar as she made use on when she were a laundress. We got the mangle up with a deal o' trouble, but we could make northen on the big clothes 'oss. We tried it one way, an' we tried it another. Says I, 'It's like a sinner; it's got into wot it can't git out on so easy.' An' with that I thinks, 'wot's the best way to do wi' sinners? Why, pray for 'em, o' course.'"

"So I goes back into the kitching an' prays. I wrastled an' struggled in prayer. The missis didn't think it o' no use, but I knowed it were. Sure enough, when we went down an' tried the 'oss agin, 'e come out o' that cellar amost of hisself. You pray, an' you'll be all right whenever you 'as to come to that there plot J nineteen."

"If you'll come wi' me," continued Sam, as they drew near the gate, "I've got a beautifl little track as I'd like to give yer; it's called 'This way to the pit.'"

"That's just where I don't want to go," said Pringle.

"It's sure to do yer a power o' good, anyways," Sam rejoined. "Yon's my 'ouse, that chimley over them trees."

Pringle took a mental note of the locality, and excused himself, saying his doctor had ordered him to never be out after dark, and he had a long way to go.

After he had parted from Sam, being desirous to know what the doctor was doing down there, Pringle was thinking that he would take an early opportunity of hearing what Mrs. Sam had to say whilst the worthy grave-digger was out at work, when he heard a voice calling after him, "I say, 'ow did yer catch yer illness? Bad cold, worn't it, at first?"

Pringle nodded.

Sam shouted back, "It's all along o' yer washin' yerself too much. Natur purvides yer with a purtection agin chills, an' yer goes an' washes it off. It's a thing as 'as killed its ten thousands. I never washes above once a week or so, an' look at me."

Pringle did look at him, and thanked Providence that he was not as Sam was, in some respects at all events.

Outside the gate he turned and saw Righton enter the cottage. The buxom Sarah stood at a little door in rear of the dwelling. Pringle went back and approached her. "Any one ill here?" he asked.

"Mind your own business," returned the damsel. "You look bad enough yourself, without bothering about other folk."

Pringle slowly looked her over, whereat Sarah slammed the door in his face.

Well," thought the inquiry agent, as he made his way back to town, "it is plain enough that the gallant colonel is dead and buried. He's fought his last fight, anyway. The only question is, 'How did he come to die?' If there has been no gammon about the taking out of the Policy, the Eagle will have to pay when they come to apply. I've made two guineas out of it, anyhow. I really should like to know some more about what friend Sawbones was doing down there; I

should indeed. What a game if there should be any resurrection work going on, and I was the one to find it out! What a sensation it would make! It would rile Williamson properly, it would, and make my fortune for me. Best advertisement out! By the way, I'll just look in at Scotland Yard and find out about that cab."

He entered a room where several policemen were hard at work, writing at desks placed at some little distance in rear of a counter.

"Hello! Pringle, my boy. How goes it?" cried a stout inspector. "Can't get on after all without coming to the old place, eh?"

"If I didn't look in now and then to bustle you up a bit, you would settle down into the lot of old fossils the *Pall Mall* says you are," replied Pringle. "I only want to make an inquiry about a bit of routine business, the kind of thing you *can* perhaps help me in. Who is the owner of hansom cab No. 17,014?"

The fat inspector referred to a big ledger.

"Dawe, Alexandra Mews, Knightsbridge," was presently his reply. "Now, Pringle, just you let those papers alone; they don't concern you." Pringle was turning over a few printed bills hanging over one another from a nail in the wall.

"Those jobs are for us, not for you," said the inspector. "You stick to your divorce business. What do you want to know about that cab for?"

"Want to find out who was in it next leap-year's day was a twelvemonth," answered Pringle, having looked through the papers.

The agent sent a man to the Mews, and found that the cab was hired out by Jacob Robinson, who drove it on his own account, and generally stood on the rank in Piccadilly outside the Green Park.

Five shillings, judiciously exhibited, extracted from Mr. Robinson the information that he had taken Mr. Corbett from King's Cross to the Grand Hotel. Pringle's emissary could learn no more; there the scent failed.

Before the agent finally closed his office for the night he wrote to Dr. Righton to that effect, enclosing his account—four guineas. That bit of useless information was all the doctor got for his money.

Next day Mr. Pringle visited the neighbourhood of Rutland Park once more. This time he was an undertaker, garbed in professional black. He made his way to Sam's cottage. Mrs. Fountain answered his knock.

"Is the grave-digger in?" Pringle asked.

"No; 'e's not, 'e's in the cimetary. Wot might you want with him?"

"Only just to ask him a question or two," the agent answered. "I want to speak to him at home, unknown to the superintendent."

"'E won't be in till six. You'd better come agin," said Mrs. Fountain, still holding the door ajar.

"I can't very well do that," Pringle replied. "Perhaps *you* could tell me what I want to know. It's about a little tip or two he ought to have had. My firm are rather doubtful whether these little matters get to the men or not. We are afraid they sometimes stick to the superintendent's fingers."

"Come in, sir," said Mrs. Fountain, opening the door with alacrity. Ousting a large black cat from a chair by the simple process of tilting it over, she dusted it for her visitor.

"You've come to arsk about money as 'e ought to have 'ad? Well, I can tell you, sir; niver a blessed penny beyond 'is wage do I ever get from 'im. An' I knows wot 'e gits pretty well, 'E has to 'and over, or I knows the reason why."

"Ah! it is as I thought then," replied Pringle. "We shall have to contrive some different arrangement."

"It's that Mudge, sir. 'E's allus after 'is fittin's; an' so's them two parsons, Church an' dissenter alike. That dissentin' uns the wust, sir, as you likely knows, an' I allus tells Sam, though 'e will 'ave it as dissenters can't do wrong."

"What do you mean by 'fittings'?" asked Pringle.

"Wot! you a hundertaker, an' not to know wot fittin's is!" cried Mrs. Fountain.

"But you see I'm head of the firm. I don't generally attend to these matters myself. The foreman manages all that," said Pringle, perceiving he had blundered over a technicality of the trade.

"Why, fittin's is 'at-bands an' gloves an' sich," explained Mrs. Fountain. "When they gives 'em at smart funerals, Mudge an' them puts old 'uns on as they 'as ready, an' they gets money instead."

"Oh, I see. Yes, of course we know the foreman does arrange little matters of that kind when it is wished; but we never inquire into them. So long as the bill is paid for all we supply, that is all we care about. By the way, do the doctors take fittings too, can you tell me?"

"They'll all on 'em take all they can get; they're all in an 'and. But that Mudge needn't go a robbin' of 'is doos the pore labourin' man as does all the work. Nex' time there's any extry money for the grave-digger, if so be as you'll send it to 'is 'ouse, I'll thank you kindly, sir."

"Talking about those doctors now, do they often come down here on the quiet? In the evening or at night-time, for instance?"

"Wotiver should they do that for?" asked the lady, beginning to think the undertaker a fool.

Mr. Pringle rose from his chair, and approaching Mrs. Fountain, who shrank from him a little doubtful of his intentions, whispered the word "Body-snatching."

Mrs. Fountain was struck dumb for a moment. At length recovering herself, she said.

"There's a many queer things done as would make folks stare if they knowed 'em, but never none o' that. Wot for should you think o' sich a thing?"

"You never see any lights about at night in the cemetery? Or find your husband coming in late; dirty, as if he had been at work?" Pringle inquired, diplomatically answering one question by asking another.

"Well, if it comes to that, there's often graves to be filled in of a night when they are busy."

"When might such times be?" asked Pringle.

"Why three or four nights ago they was diggin' very late. I axed Fountain wot they'd been a doin' on when 'e comed in, an' 'e tells me, as 'e often does, 'the Bible says as women is to keep silence.' Says I, 'They can't do northen else if they're niver telled northen.' That was all as ever I said, I do assure you, sir, an' 'e ups——"

"And strikes you, I suppose, poor woman?" interrupted Pringle.

"No, that wouldn't 'a been northen, but 'e gets 'is Bible, an' then 'e prays at me as if I was in hell fire, an' I'd liefer be sworn at in the reglar way, a good deal."

"Well, Mrs. Fountain, it seems to me there's a little more money being made than there ought to be. You ought to see that your husband gets his share. Just you let me know next time there's anything going on at night. Send me a telegram at once to this address. My name is Jacks—Mr. Jacks. If you see strange carts or vans or cabs or anything about, let me know that instant, and I'll see you get your rights. Injustice makes my heart burn, it does. Now, not a word to anybody, mind. We'll keep our own secret, and find theirs out too."

The bargain was struck, and the pseudo-undertaker departed. Had he been a little later he would have encountered the doctor again.

That Tuesday evening Righton hoped to find a material improvement in his patient. When he had passed this consumptive-looking inquiry agent the previous evening, and had entered the cemetery cottage, Olive met him with the intelligence that the sufferer was awake. He was still dazed and weak, but he had spoken—feebly, and without apparently perceiving anything strange in his surroundings, but not with the frenzy of one distraught. His mind seemed like the awakening intelligence of a little child. This was more

satisfactory than anything the young surgeon had expected. Enjoining that the unknown should be kept as tranquil as possible, and gladdening Sarah's heart by giving her leave to administer some of her beef-tea, he had left after dressing the injury.

Another twenty-four hours brought a yet more decided change for the better. Yet on the doctor's visit he found Olive in tears.

"This won't do, Miss Mudge," he said. "I shall have to depose you in favour of the practical Sarah; she has no nerves to speak of, I feel certain."

"It is not nerves, Dr. Righton. It is the fate of this poor young fellow that has so affected me. Uncle John has been telling me of how he came to be here. Was ever any one rescued literally from death in so marvellous a manner before? To think that but for uncle's accidental glimpse of that mark, he would have been, not only killed, but consigned to nameless horrors! Dr. Righton, it has been the providence of God. The opening of that door, my fall, his prompt assistance, all have been links in a chain marvellously wrought."

"And, Miss Mudge," rejoined the doctor, "there may yet be other links. I have been brought here, for instance. Who can tell whither this train of circumstances may lead? It may change your life—I trust that it will in one sense; for could I influence you at all, I would urge that you should not follow out that career you have designed for yourself. I would ask you to be as certain of your vocation to such a life, as she who takes the veil should be certain she will not regret the step she takes. Pardon me if I say so much, but had I never met you, as might have been the case, the opportunity might have been wanting for putting views which I entertain so strongly before you. There is, I feel, a Providence in this also."

After a moment's pause he continued, changing his manner with the subject—

"How is this patient of yours to-day?"

"He has been trying to induce me to tell him what has befallen him. His memory, I think, has come back.

Can we not ask him of his friends? Think of the anxiety they may be feeling; the weight of this responsibility has been upon me all day."

"I must see him first," Righton replied.

They ascended to the sick-room, where the superintendent, always a restless man, was keeping an uneasy watch.

After examining his condition, the doctor, glancing at Olive, said—

"This is a strange chance that has brought you here."

The patient opened his eyes.

"I remember being on board a ship," he said, in a weak voice, "where I was well and strong, and I awake to find myself a child."

"He's wandering," said Mudge; "he does not look like a sailor."

The doctor raised his hand with a gesture that enjoined silence. At this moment John Hampden Mudge entered the room.

The sufferer spoke again.

"Tell Baigent's," he murmured, "that I could not deliver the letter. Baigent's of Lombard Street."

Righton pressed his hand in assent, while the porter drew hurriedly nearer the bed and scanned the young man's countenance.

"I'll be shot if it isn't," he exclaimed in a loud voice.

The doctor drew him from the room.

"Another shout like that," he said, outside, "and you may give him that which may destroy his life. Come downstairs and tell me what you mean."

"Look here," said the porter, producing a crumpled piece of paper, "this is what I mean—

"£100 REWARD."

"Whereas Charles Edward Bowman, clerk to Messrs. Baigent, Coxon, and Co., Bankers, Lombard Street, absconded on the 8th of September, having in his pos-

session valuable securities as specified below, the above reward will be paid for any information that may lead to the conviction of the said Charles Edward Bowman, or to the recovery of the securities.

“The aforesaid defaulter is 5 ft. 10 in. high, of fair complexion, grey eyes, light brown hair, and is strongly built. Has a scar on back of right wrist. He is believed to have worn on the day he absconded black diagonal coat and waistcoat, grey mixture trousers, and a tall hat. He is a person of superior address and manners.’”

Olive, who had entered the room, looked over her uncle's shoulder as he read.

“It is the same,” she said. “It must be. He talked of Baigent's.—But I will never believe that he has done wrong. He did not save my life, an utter stranger, on an impulse of pity and then change the nature that prompted him to that kindly act, for the selfish, calculating character such a thief must have.”

“Olive,” exclaimed the doctor—“I mean Miss Mudge—you are right. I believe with you that he is not a criminal.”

John Hampden Mudge shook his head.

“It's a queer world,” he sententiously remarked; “‘there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy!’ Well, he's safe enough here, any way. He's been buried, and come to life again a new man. It's a better hiding than any I ever heard of.”

“Yes, Uncle, but then they don't know he's here; if they find that out, whatever has happened to him will not protect him. Sarah tells me a stranger was making inquiries if we had a sick person here last night. I feel he is *not* safe here. I am sure he ought to go as soon as he can be moved.”

“He might perhaps be moved to-morrow, if he is still improving, and it were done very carefully,” observed the doctor. “But I cannot let him go where I can't look after him.”

“I'll tell you what,” he continued. “Suppose we

take him to my mother's at Fulham. Miss Mudge perhaps will come too, and help my sister to nurse him."

After much discussion this course was decided on, subject to the condition of the patient. An invalid carriage was to be brought the following night, and Olive would follow next day.

Oliver Cromwell and John Hampden agreed, after the doctor had departed, that this would be much the best course. "I can't have any risks of people coming sniffing about and making inquiries here;" said Oliver. "Goodness knows what sort of row might be made, and what might happen. There's too many in it now, as it is. That Sam might let the whole thing out as easy as not. Nobody knows what twist that religion of his might give his conscience. It would be almost better if he could see the man go off the premises with his own eyes."

CHAPTER IX.

BODY-SNATCHING.

MRS. FOUNTAIN was, as has been already stated, in the opinion of her husband, a clean woman. Therefore, when Sam dined at home, his sense of the fitness of things was occasionally offended by the saucepan or dripping tin in which the dinner was contained not being placed in the centre of the table in all its grimy unctuousness, but left on the hob — the custom, as Mrs. Fountain assured the grave-digger, in her own and all other genteel families.

Sam was ladling up for himself a goodly portion of Irish stew, when his wife rose from her chair, and shoved him on one side. "Look there, you clumsy brute! There you go a spilin' of the buzzum of your best shirt as you 'as got to wear at the prayer-meeting to-night, after all the trouble as I've had with it this morning."

Sam ventured to intimate that he was not going to the meeting.

"Wednesday night, and you not goin' to the meetin' as 'as sich a gift! All on 'em knows wot's comin' as soon as you begins. Wot next. I wonder? Not goin' to the meetin'! Why, you'll be goin' to the public or to church next."

"Now you just 'old that there long tongue of yours," Sam interjected, during the first pause in the lady's remarks. "I can't go to the meetin' cos I've got to go to work; an' that's all about it."

"Goin' to work at eight o'clock? In the dark? That's a very likely tale. Maybe you're going to bury a suicide with a stake through him! I know yer, I know wot yer up to; you an' that Mudge, a diggin' of the poor Christian buried uns up again, an' a sellin' of 'em to them doctors."

Sam looked confused at this unexpected charge, but he was ready enough with his reply. "It's a matter as I've got orders to 'old my tongue about, an' that's all you'll get to know. Reckerlect wot the Book says," he added, as he made for the door.

Mrs. Fountain screamed after him the rejoinder, "Yes, but it says, 'if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home.'"

Sam, having banged the door after himself in a very un-Plymouth-brotherly fashion, the quotation missed its mark.

The cause of all the disturbance was, that Mudge had bidden Sam to be in waiting that evening to help to carry downstairs the young man they had found.

After Fountain had gone, his wife rushed off to the telegraph office and intimated to Mr. Jacks that he had better be on hand at the cemetery at eight o'clock that night.

When the telegram had been despatched, Mrs. Fountain repented. She feared she had got her husband into a serious difficulty. If it had not been that the trouble to her mind took the form of something with a policeman in it, no qualms would have disturbed her

wifely bosom ; but prisons and magistrates were not to be trifled with.

She therefore repaired to the post-office again, and asked to have the message sent back to her without delivery. She knew a postmaster in the country who had once restored a mis-directed letter to her sister ; and she did not see why she could not have the telegram back.

To her surprise she was unsuccessful in her application.

Nevertheless, she contrived to keep Sam out of the threatened peril by abstracting his boots and locking him in when he came to tea.

Sam spent the evening in shouting and banging at the door, but no neighbours came to let him out. It was supposed he was engaged rather more fervidly than usual in his religious exercises, and they hesitated to disturb him.

A little before eight the same evening, a dirty white pony, drawing a little cart, trotted up to the door of the "Black Dog" opposite the cemetery gate, and a chimney-sweep wearing an extra coating of soot hung the reins over the head of his brush, which projected from the front of the vehicle. Descending, he called for a quart of beer, which he proceeded to sip, standing outside the house.

It was Mr. Pringle in effective disguise. If you want to make yourself thoroughly unrecognisable by all your friends, the best way to go about it is to blacken your face. Make the hue sufficiently jetty, and your own mother would not know you unless she were in the secret. Pringle was well aware of this fact, and an ebony complexion was one of his favourite modes of concealing his identity. He preferred to be a sweep, because it did not matter very much if a little of the black got rubbed off.

He had not very long to wait before a private omnibus, with John Hampden Mudge on the box beside the driver, drew up at the gates. The superintendent opened them wide, and it went inside the grounds.

Pringle knew the hospital porter well, and felt he was on the right scent this time.

Dr. Righton had spent some time in transforming the interior of the omnibus into an invalid carriage. He had suspended cords from the straps in the roof and made a kind of swinging cot, so that the motion of the vehicle was neutralized as much as possible.

When he emerged from the inside at Mudge's door, he found Oliver in a state of vexation at Sam's non-appearance.

"All the better," said the doctor. "We can carry him down ourselves. Is there any change?"

"A little stronger, I think," was the answer. "He makes no pretence of denying that his name is Bowman, and says his father was Rector of Cottisham, but is now dead. Upon my word, I feel almost as sorry for him as I am for myself. Olive has told him he is going to be taken where he can be nursed better than here."

Without any unnecessary delay, the patient was rolled in a blanket and a dark rug thrown over the bundle. Sarah rushed up at the last moment and thrust a little package into his hand. "What's that?" inquired Righton.

"Only a few lozengers," she answered. "I always gave 'em to the children when I took 'em out in the pram; it kep' 'em quiet like, sir."

Olive and the doctor exchanged a quiet smile unperceived by the faithful damsel.

It was rather a difficult matter to convey the sufferer down the narrow stairs, more so than it had been to get him up when insensible. Sarah held the lantern, and the suspiciously enveloped figure was deposited in the carriage.

Pringle had crossed the road, and beheld the embarkation through the railings.

The doctor again seated himself inside, and John Hampden ascended the box.

"What a nerve the man must have," thought Pringle, "to ride up to St. Lawrence's with a body, like that! Perhaps he wants to have first turn at it

before it gets among the rest of them." Replacing his half-emptied pot on the window-sill, he mounted his cart and trotted the pony away in rear of the larger vehicle.

He found himself out of his calculations, however, when the omnibus, instead of taking the road to St. Lawrence's, turned aside down a lane bordered with market gardens, and proceeded towards Fulham.

It stopped at a neat little house veiled with creepers and nestling in a garden, not far from the main entrance of the Palace grounds. Pringle drove past and pulled up the pony round the corner. Returning on foot, he was in time to see the body carried indoors.

Again mounting his cart, he drove off towards London, saying to himself, "What things a detective does come across to be sure! I'll work my medical friend for this; see if I don't!"

The latter part of the remark seemed to be addressed to the pony, for he uttered it aloud as he gave it an ill-tempered cut with his whip. The reason of that was, Pringle had just recollected, when too late, that it would have been wise to have dodged the omnibus and seen where it came from.

Mrs. Righton had been apprised by a letter from her son of the intended advent of the patient. The difficulty of carrying an invalid upstairs had been obviated by her daughter Cicely giving up the airy apartment she occupied as study and workroom; and all had been made ready for the arrival of the stranger.

It is not every mother who would allow her house to be invaded and upset for a whim of her boy's, but to these two women Cuthbert's lightest wish was a law.

Herself the widow of a famous surgeon, hoping in time to see her son equally celebrated, Mrs. Righton was the more ready to do what she could to help him in the study of his profession.

In his letter Righton had given her a sketch of the facts of the case, and one name mentioned had carried her thoughts back to the time when she and Mary Carberry had been girls together.

This evening she had been recalling the memories of those early days before Mary Carberry had become Mary Bowman, and had been talking of them with Cicely.

"She died, my love, whilst still quite a girl. There was just one little child, a boy. How well I remember seeing her with her baby on her knee in the nursery of that Cambridgeshire Rectory, looking so well and strong and yet so soon to be taken away from husband and child! So well, but that day so sad! The poor little fellow had met with an accident. Some careless servant had managed to burn his arm, a baby a few months old. It was never explained how the accident happened, but the mark left on the child was a very curious one. I recollect his father saying, 'There is no fear of our losing this little man, Mrs. Righton: that mark on his arm will identify him for ever.' I wonder if this is the boy," she concluded, looking up at her daughter.

"Hardly likely, mother, it is a very common name; there must be hundreds of Bowmans in London."

They were ready to welcome the young doctor when the omnibus drove up. Bowman was carried in, and found still under the influence of the opiate that had been administered shortly before starting to save him unnecessary pain. Righton had watched him carefully the whole time, and not a single fold of the bandage had become displaced.

"So," said Mrs. Righton, as they sat beside the bed, "you have rescued this poor fellow from the grave. It is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard or read of."

"No, a man who works in the cemetery was the person who rescued him, mother. I have done no more than be the surgeon of his hurts."

"You spoke, Cuthbert," said his mother eagerly, "of a mark on his arm. May I see it?"

"Of course, mother, if you want. But what good will that do?"

Mrs. Righton had turned back Bowman's sleeve. "It is the same!" she exclaimed. "He is the son of Mary Bowman, the dearest friend of my young days."

"What, of Cottisham? How stupid of me not to have hit on this before. The man at Rutland Park told me he had said he was a Bowman of Cottisham."

"I shall nurse him myself, Cuthbert; I shall indeed, for his dear mother's sake."

"Well, there is help coming for that. The young lady who has been nursing him, and is very medically minded, is to be here to-morrow. I asked her to come."

"Oh, Cuthbert, how could you? Write and tell her we can manage him ourselves."

"I would rather she came, mother. You see I have asked her; and she is the most sensible girl I ever met."

"You have asked her on your own account, my boy."

Righton blushed and replied, "Well, perhaps I partly did, mother; but you will let her come, won't you?"

Mrs. Righton made no answer, and Cuthbert knew his mother well enough to feel sure that the matter was for the present settled as he wished it.

"What is the young lady's name, Cuthbert?" asked his mother, as he was preparing to take his departure.

"Olive," he answered.

"I did not mean her Christian name; but your answer shows me what you are thinking of. I must see her myself before I can say more, my son."

"Her name is Miss Mudge, mother," he said, as he kissed her.

"What a dreadful name! It sounds very unpromising. I think really she must not come."

"You have agreed, mother, and you must abide by it," he said, as he turned to go.

Olive came next day, and proved quite a surprise to Mrs. Righton. Cicely said, "I knew she must be nice if Cuthbert likes her."

Here was no underbred, half-educated girl, they saw; still less was she the spectacled withered-before-her-time creature they had pictured as the typical lady doctor. Quietly garbed, fair, intellectual looking and so young, her very contrast to what Mrs. Righton had

expected made her regard the real Olive with friendly feelings, out of a kind of mental opposition to those she had entertained for the imaginary Olive of her suspicions.

"If the worst comes, thank Heaven it is no worse," she thought.

Cicely and Olive became friends almost at once. The tall dark girl and the shorter fair one walked in the garden during that hour of absence from the sick-room which Mrs. Righton had decreed Olive must take each day. They talked of Righton and his patient—more of the doctor than of the invalid; their common interest in the subject of their conversation drew them closer together.

When Righton came in the evening, he pronounced Bowman to have progressed so far that in a day or two his bed might be wheeled into the adjoining room which opened from it with large folding-doors.

Before the Rightons occupied Belvoir Cottage, this room had evidently been a drawing-room made by knocking down the partition between two smaller apartments. There being another room her mother preferred, Cicely had laid claim to this. One half of it had been hastily furnished as a bedroom, the other retained its ordinary aspect as her workroom. With a window at each end, it was an ideal room for an invalid to grow well in.

Righton was exceedingly perplexed about the charge that was hanging over Bowman. Not that he believed in it for a moment, but he saw no way to clear him. Now that Bowman was, in right of his mother, not only a "case" but a friend, he was anxious for his safety as well as his life. There was nothing for it but to wait till Bowman himself could tell his tale. A few days, if all went well, might solve the difficulty.

CHAPTER X.

THE DETECTIVE'S LITTLE MISTAKE.

ALTHOUGH circumstances have compelled us to view Mr. Pringle in this investigation as, so far, an unsuccessful man and a bungler, a travesty in his extraordinary disguises of the detective of every-day life, he was by no means a failure in the line of life he had taken up.

More than one thing contributed to his usual success. He generally acted, for instance, on the maxim, "If you want a thing done well, do it yourself." He had so far risen superior to the conventionalities of his craft, that the means he adopted in making his inquiries were such as no detective had ever thought of before. Also he made it a rule, as far as possible, to endeavour to obtain his information from women. In this he was right in the result, though the method he acted upon often proved a false one. Women thought from his manner that he imagined he had a way with him which placed him on a footing with their more cunning sex, enabling him to distance all others in competition for their confidence. Therefore they rejoiced in trying to make a fool of him. Pringle well knew that no man was ever a match for a woman in concealing personal motives, or in divining the motives of others. He would, in his career, have been taken in a thousand times, had not his native conceit made him cling to original impressions, in spite of all the dust that was thrown in his eyes by feminine hands. So often had he found his theories at variance with the information that was tendered him, that he had at last come to lay down this rule on which he acted. "If you want to find anything out from a woman, make up your mind she is not telling the truth, and form your conclusions in exactly the opposite direction to that in which she is evidently desirous to lead you!" This plan held good when he had to deal with women who had something to conceal. But when he was on an entirely wrong scent, dealing

with those who had nothing to hide, his very craftiness led him to a hundred wrong surmises and an infinitude of useless pains.

Acting on his regular rule, he determined to find out all that he could from the women he had seen at the door of Belvoir Cottage, before he proceeded to "work the doctor."

First ascertaining that the house surgeon's duties at the hospital kept him there during the day, he proceeded early in the afternoon to Fulham without any disguise. Easily ascertaining in the neighbourhood that Mrs. Righton was the lady of the house, he sent in his card:

*"Mr. Pringle,
Private Inquiry Agent."*

Mrs. Righton received him with only the vaguest idea of what a private inquiry agent might be. "Something to do with the Income Tax Office, or those men we see standing about in the street with desks," she thought.

"I came down here, madam," he said, "on some business with which Dr. Righton has entrusted me. He wished me to find out something for him about a Mr. Corbett, who failed to appear as a witness at an inquest. I am sorry to find from the servant that the doctor is not at home."

"Perhaps you have a message to leave with me on the matter?" Mrs. Righton said, wishing to get rid of Mr. Pringle as quickly as possible.

"Well, I rather expected he might have left a message for me with you."

"No, Mr.—Mr. Pringle," Mrs. Righton replied, glancing at the card, "I know nothing whatever of the matter. My son is sure to be here this evening; as a rule he is very uncertain, but something requires his presence here very frequently just now. I can tell him anything you wish to say."

"I wonder where that 'something' is," he thought; "and how much the old girl knows about it."

Mrs. Righton had risen, as if she intended her visitor to go. But he had come for business, and meant to do it if possible.

"I suppose he prosecutes his studies here sometimes, it's a quiet place?" he went on to ask. "It's a fine thing for a doctor to have a place like this away from all disturbance. That Dr. Benjulia, in Wilkie Collins' book, knew what he was about when he went into the suburbs for his vivisections."

"My son is quite against all vivisection," she stiffly remarked, drawing out her watch as a hint.

Mr. Pringle determined to take the bull by the horns and frighten the lady; perhaps the doctor would be all the more amenable afterwards. "Well now, madam," he said, "perhaps he is not so averse to another kind of investigation. I happen to know what he brought here from the cemetery the other evening. What do you think of that?"

Mrs. Righton was excessively alarmed. Not at all thinking of what Pringle was really driving at, but of the safety of her friend's son with a perilous accusation hanging over him, she asked, "Are you in the police?"

"No, madam; but once I was. You may be thankful I am not now. If you had them to deal with instead of me, it might be a very serious matter for the doctor."

"Why, my son has not done anything wrong. There can surely be no harm in succouring the helpless and unhappy!"

"Yes, but when the succour takes the form of digging up the dead and carrying them off in secret to private houses, it is a very grave matter indeed. Excuse the pun," he added with a smile, by way of letting her see he was a man who might be confidentially treated.

"But this person was not dead," Mrs. Righton unguardedly remarked, ignoring the latter part of his observation.

"Not dead? Why to my certain information he or she was brought straight here from the very graveyard. Let me assure you concealment is useless." How true, he reflected, were those principles on which he acted.

"Dr. Righton brought a body here the other night," he continued. "I saw him do it with my own eyes. Whatever good may be done to humanity by such practices as those of the violators of churchyards, they none the less commit an offence against the law."

Mrs. Righton had by this time perceived the ridiculous mistake the man had made.

"If you will undertake to ask no more questions, and I show you the person, under the promise of secrecy, just to convince you of your error," she said, "will that satisfy you?"

Pringle ruminated a moment. "Yes," he answered, "if you take me straight there without ringing the bell or making any preparations."

Mrs. Righton led him to the room where Bowman was lying. With the bandage on his head, and his thin pale countenance, he looked a ghastly object; but there was no doubt about his being alive. Olive and Cicely were there, the former reading, with a book upon her knee. Bowman was saying, with less languor in his voice than Mrs. Righton had noticed before, "I like those adventurous books: to hear them read seems to give me strength. That's the kind of life for a man, better than running up figures at Baigent's."

"Hush," said Olive, "you are not allowed to talk yet."

Pringle, with his detective's eye, had taken a good look at the invalid during the moment he stood in the doorway.

"Now, sir, are you satisfied?" asked Mrs. Righton, after they had come away.

"Yes; I don't mind owning for once that I have made a mistake—which is not what every man in my business would allow."

As he left the house he reflected, "No such great mistake, after all. There is a mystery in this business. The old lady was desperately frightened."

He had all along recollected Dr. Righton's advertisement for Stacpoole, appearing just beside his own modest announcement of his business.

"Can this be the Stacpoole, I wonder. There's something up I must get to the bottom of."

Mrs. Righton had that very afternoon determined to do a little piece of business on her own account. It was some time after Pringle's departure before she felt sufficiently composed to enter upon anything else, but at length she entered the sick-room. "I wish you would come out with me into the garden this afternoon, Miss Mudge. You must not stay indoors like this. Come now, and Cicely will come after, when you have had your turn."

Olive obeyed.

After a little desultory talk, Mrs. Righton began: "My son tells me you are going to enter his profession."

"Well, I did think of it, but I have felt a little uncertain lately, after what he said to me about it," replied Olive.

"And what did he say, my dear?"

"Oh, he was telling me that he hardly thought it was suitable for me. In fact, he put it so strongly that I am almost persuaded to do as he wishes."

"Then supposing you give up the idea, what do you propose to do instead? I say this because I imagine you intend to devote yourself to work of some kind."

"I hardly know; I have not thought yet. My mind is not in any way made up. My father wants me to take up music seriously, and has had me educated partly with that view. But I don't think my heart is sufficiently in it for me to do well."

"Teaching is great drudgery, I agree," said Mrs. Righton, thoughtfully.

"It wasn't teaching my father thought of, but concerts and so on: being a pianiste, you know."

"Next door to going on the stage," thought Mrs. Righton. "But I suppose you have given that up now. Perhaps you are thinking of settling down to a home life. There may be somebody who is looking forward to making a home for you."

Olive looked on the ground and said nothing.

"Perhaps some one of your friends," Mrs. Righton con-

tinued, "has none of the obstacles in his way my son, for instance, has. It would be years before Cuthbert could think of anything of the kind. It would prevent his rising in his profession."

"I thought," Olive innocently remarked, "it was better for a doctor to be a married man."

"A general practitioner, perhaps; but not a great surgeon, such as my son hopes to become. He will have to give his whole heart to his profession, to rise to the level his father reached. When he marries, years hence, it will be some one, no doubt, who can help him to get on in society. Some one with plenty of friends of the right kind."

Olive's heart fell; the bright afternoon seemed to have grown dull somehow.

Mrs. Righton turned and said, "I must go now. Please tell my daughter not to forget she has to take her turn in the open air when you go back."

"It is very evident what you are driving at, Mrs. Righton," thought Olive; "but you need be in no fear." She felt too much disturbed to go to the sick-room just then, and went to her own bedroom to think over the state of matters. Whilst Mrs. Righton was blighting Olive's hopes in the garden, Bowman and Cicely were by no means silent. It was wonderful what a quantity of conversation the invalid seemed to require. Cicely had been repeating to him the history of the mark on her patient's arm, as Mrs. Righton had related it, and astonished him by her acquaintance with his family history. As she spoke, her expression changing with every moment, Bowman, somewhat unused to ladies' society, thought her the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"Ah," he said, during a pause, "if I had only had a sister to take care of me, instead of being all alone in the world, it would have been a great deal better for me. But you see I have to get on the best way I can with other fellows' sisters. On the whole, though, I think I rather prefer it."

"Now, Mr. Bowman, you know my brother's orders

are that you are not to talk. Try and imagine that you are a boy in school, and obliged to be silent on pain of punishment."

"Very well, Miss Righton; then you shall be the schoolmistress—you shall teach and I will learn."

"What shall I teach you?" asked Cicely, assuming a very prim expression.

"Nay, if I am to choose my lessons," he replied, "I am afraid I shall only choose what I like; and that would not do at all. You would never do for a governess; you ought to be more disagreeable; much more disagreeable."

"So I can be, as you will discover. Very disagreeable indeed. Silence, sir!"

"I am sure you can be nothing of the kind——"

"Silence, sir!"

"I should never find you disagreeable," reiterated Bowman, who was an impudent young dog in his way.

"Not a word. Here, take your medicine at once."

"What a very unromantic person you are, Miss Righton, and wicked besides! When a pearl of truth is on my lips you want to dispel it with a dose of physic, which is one of the greatest frauds I know."

"At all events, Mr. Bowman, you must drink this, and then go to sleep. I will stand no nonsense about that."

Bowman took the glass from her hand, and put it down untasted on the table beside him.

"Very well, I shall call Miss Mudge," said Cicely, "and she shall hold you, and I will pour it down your throat."

"I should not mind if you were to do the holding while she manipulated the medicine," replied Bowman.

Cicely looked displeased, and Bowman saw that he was going too far. "You must forgive the ramblings of an invalid," he said; "imagine that I am delirious."

"You will be, if you talk any more."

"All right. I'll be good," said he. "Give me the physic now, please, and I'll take it obediently."

Bowman was beginning to talk again, when Cicely

said, "If you utter another syllable I shall have to gag you."

"Take care of your hand if you try it; for I shall——"

"Shall what, Mr. Bowman?"

"Bite it," he answered hastily, as Olive entered the room. "Put that down to the delirium, Miss Righton. What do you think, Miss Mudge, of hydrophobia? I am playing the mad dog and talking of biting Miss Righton."

When Righton came, his mother opened an attack upon him.

"How long do you think such very sedulous nursing will be necessary, Cuthbert?"

"Another week or two. A hole in a man's head does not mend in a day. But why do you ask; you don't surely want to get him out of the house?"

"No, indeed; but I should think we ought soon to be able to manage by ourselves. Miss Mudge must be wanted at home."

"I hope she will stay here as long as she can. You are very glad to have her, mother, are you not?"

"I think she would be better at home with her own people. You see she is not exactly in our own rank of life.—And, besides, my dear Cuthbert, you seem to me to take too much interest in that young person. You cannot surely have any serious thoughts about her?"

"I have indeed, mother. I think there is no one like her."

"It would ruin you, my boy. Think of that uncle of hers, the porter at your hospital. What would your position be there with that man for a connection? And then her grave-digging father; it would be said that the cemetery was a family concern—you provided him with customers."

"Mother! I never knew you could be bitter like this before. I have myself thought of the difficulty about the porter, and have sent my resignation to the committee to-day."

"My boy, my boy! What would your father have said?"

"I don't want to grieve you, mother; we won't talk about it now any more. I will not do anything at present; what I do shall be well pondered first. I intend to act with common sense, but don't think the common sense is all on one side of the question. I am thinking of taking up the brain, and shall look for a post in a suitable hospital. That is one motive I have in resigning. A man must be a specialist to do anything great in these days."

When the doctor finally appeared in the sick-room, Bowman asked if he might talk with him. Permission was given. He then gave an account of the circumstances that had led to his accident on the ship.

"What is Skelton like?" asked the doctor.

"A little, round-shouldered, sandy, sharp-nosed fellow," Bowman answered.

"Was he with you when you were hurt?"

"No, he left me at Charing Cross, and I saw no more of him."

"Well, just such a man brought you to the hospital that Thursday afternoon. He called himself Corbett, and I have tried in vain to find him since. Then I have also tried to find Mr. Stacpoole, of the *Potosi*."

"Stacpoole! Why he is one of Baigent's biggest customers. I was to meet him on the ship. How did you hear of him?"

"An envelope, full of blank paper, and addressed to him, was found in your pocket."

"What do you say? Blank paper?" cried Bowman, raising himself in the bed. A look of agony came over his face, and he fell back again.

Righton approached him with a restorative.

"No, thank you, I don't need that," said Bowman; "I see it all now. It is a plant. He has robbed me! What shall I do? Here I am lying here, and my good name at stake." He burst into tears of weakness.

Righton forbade any further talk for the present; but it was no use, his patient was far too excited to heed orders.

"Will you do something for me at once?" Bowman

asked. "Write to Mr. Nugent, of Cottisham Court, my father's friend. He will help me if any one can. Tell him all you know, and how I am lying here. Ask him if he will come to help to save me."

Righton called to his sister, and told her in a few hurried whispers to write what Bowman wished. He could not attend to anything but his patient, for whom he had become alarmed.

Before midnight Bowman was again under the influence of an opiate ; but, except for anxiety, was not materially worse next day. Mr. Nugent's answering telegram gave him hope. "*Will be with you to-morrow, and do all I can. Unfortunately cannot leave to-day.*"

BOOK III.

THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL.

CHAPTER XI.

“SATAN.”

YEARS ago, before the era of omnipotent trades-unionism and high wages, it was not unfrequently the case that a clever workman set up in business for himself by the aid of his frugal savings. By dint of self-denial and hard work, in a few years he was able to employ workmen of his own. Sometimes he made his fortune. Now-a-days a workman can make money very easily, but he has also acquired the faculty of spending it with equal facility. Not one in a thousand ever puts by so much as a sovereign a year. He lives to enjoy himself. Betting, music-halls, workmen's clubs—not the old kind, when Oddfellows and Foresters wedded useful thrift to harmless pageantry, but the new kind where drink and cards can be indulged in *ad libitum*—such things keep the winner of good wages poor. He gives himself a holiday whenever he feels a little more lazy than usual. Take a walk along the banks of the Thames when any boat-racing or practising is going on, and you will see the well-dressed British workman dropping his half-crowns over the three card trick, and illustrating the old adage about a fool and his money.

Edward Odell, plumber and bell-hanger, was exceedingly free with his money. He would have been a fair workman had not the jerry builder spoilt him. His tastes were far too expensive for him to pursue that course of economy by which the small tradesman transmutes himself into the large one. His plan was this. He would contract with the jerry builder to do the plumbing of one of those new sixty-pound-a-year houses that spring up by magic in London suburbs. The builder found the material and Odell found the labour. With the assistance of a boy he could knock off a job like that in a fortnight, and would pocket twelve pounds for it. Odell was then a man of leisure for a week or two. Public-houses where little matches with the small gloves are brought off then rejoiced in Mr. Odell's patronage. When his money was gone, another job of the same kind easily replenished his pocket.

There came a time when the jerry builder rather overdid it; the supply of suburban villas at sixty pounds a year exceeded the demand, and Ned Odell found himself with plenty of time on his hands, and no money in his pouch to make it pass pleasantly. He was in a fitting condition to listen to the voice of the tempter.

One afternoon the tempter sat opposite to him in the vile lodgings in Ann Street, Westminster, where Odell resided with an ex-housemaid who ought to have been Mrs. Odell. The ex-housemaid was out doing a little charing; the coast was therefore clear for the tempter, whose sobriquet was Chelsea Dick. Times were bad with that worthy; he had lived in the cold shade of adversity since Corkey Scott had knocked him out in a round and a half. Dick had ventured to make a morning call on his former admirer and supporter, in hopes of succour and suction. Alas! a dry pipe was all the hospitality Ned Odell could show him. Ned's last half-ounce of bird's-eye was rapidly diminishing under the attentions of himself and friend.

"Well, Ned, this is a come down, and no bloomin' error," the gentleman from Chelsea remarked. "You

mindin' a babby; next thing you'll be carryin' it out on a Sunday arternoon."

"Down on my luck, Dick—not the price of 'alf a pint about me, or I wouldn't be sittin' 'ere, you may take yer oath of that." Ned sat with his elbows on his knees, after the manner of his kind when out of spirits, and parted his moustache reflectively with his pipe stem as he said this.

"Baccy's gettin' low, Ned, only another pipeful apiece—wot's to be done then?"

"Done! Why, go to the devil. Now if there 'ad only been somethin' lively goin' on up Trafalgar Square way, watches and chains tumblin' out 'o broken windows! Wot a time them chaps must 'ave 'ad when they got the cham and whisky out o' that spirit merchant's shop. No chance of any o' that now."

"I'll tell you what it is, Ned," said Chelsea Dick; "you want a job o' work, that's about it, isn't it?"

"Yes, worse luck," replied Odell.

"Well, I know of a little job, not quite in your line p'raps," said Dick, "but one as you can take a hand in. Lot's of coin to be made out of it."

"Eh, wot?" cried Odell, shaking off his listless attitude.

"Yes, lots of swag, as one of them robbers of the poor as 'as got it without workin' for is keepin' the people, the rightful owners, you an' me, Ned, out of. Wot they calls the law, rich man's law, says it's 'is. I says it isn't, it's your an' mine, it's ours by rights. Wot call 'as that feller to be a swillin' his champagne and smokin' heighteenpenny cigars, payin' for 'em with our money, when the downtrodden worker, as makes the wealth of Hengland, is down to 'is last pipeful o' baccy?" Chelsea Dick fiercely demanded.

"Very true, Dick; but I don't see as 'ow that will help us."

"Why, you fool, 'elp yourself. If the law won't 'elp you, you must take it into your own 'ands."

"I don't say," said Ned, "as might doesn't go for right in this country, but there is a little too much

might about it. I don't want to 'elp myself into the jug. 'Ow about that?"

"There wouldn't be the smallest chance o' that in this job as I knows on," replied Dick, "if we could only manage them confounded electric bells. Folk now-a-days sticks up a lot o' them things, and then goes to bed in peaceful innercence. 'Bell is sure to ring,' they say. If yer once gets inside without ringing 'em, why you may make as much noise as you likes, and they will only think it's the cat jumpin' about if they does waken. You're the man for them bells, Ned."

Now Edward Odell, though a British workman and a dissipated one, was not above taking an interest in electricity as applied to household arrangements. He fancied he did know something about electric bells.

"What sort of place is it?" he asked.

"Why it's out away to the nor'-west. A young fellow as 'as come into money lives there with his mother and sister. 'E's goin' the pace, and comes 'ome drunk pretty well every night. There's only four women-servants beside, up at the top of the house. The police only goes past once every two hours, an' its 'alf a mile away from the next 'ouse. The only thing is, every blessed door and window 'as them bloomin' bells. There's a sort of French window openin' into the garding, as easy to work as winkin' only for them bells. If you could stop 'em ringin', we could make a pile out of that crib."

Ned shook his head. "It's not in my line, not but wot I could stop them bells easy enough, leastways that French window one; but I'm not goin' inside anybody's 'ouse, that way."

"I'll tell yer wot," said the Chelsea pugilist, "I was going to propose we should go shares, but I go you a quarter of the swag, and do all the inside part of the job myself. Just you, as a scientific bellhanger, execute my orders about them electric bells in my 'ouse, an' I'll do the rest. I'll make it a matter o' business for you, Ned. 'Ow's that? Now I'm a gentleman with a 'ouse in the country, an' 'earin' as you is a first-rate

'and at puttin' electric bells in order, I requests yer to attend at my 'ouse to do the job. I'm occypied in town, and can't get 'ome till a matter of half-past one in the morning. You must be at my mansion at that hour, and I'll show you the job. Think over the horder, my man," he continued, "an' I'll call agin an' let you know when I'm ready for yer."

Dick filled his pipe with the last crumbs of the tobacco, and took his departure.

When he had gone, Edward Odell sat lost in thought for a few minutes. Then rising, he drew out a box from under the bed, and rummaged out some back numbers of the *English Mechanic*.

After half an hour's study of diagrams, he said to himself, "It all depends whether the contact is made in the door-frame or under a flap inside. Ten to one it is a flap, for they would never put it in the frame of a window with a pane big enough for a man to get through. I don't know as I'll do it though; it's not my sort of game at all."

Here the baby awoke, and Odell was doing his best to pacify its cries, when a step was heard on the uncarpeted stair—slow and weary enough at first, but afterwards, as the child's cry drew shriller, quick and eager.

Throwing down a shilling and a sixpence on the table, an untidy but not bad-looking young woman rushed to the ragged bed in which the child lay.

Presently turning to Odell with the baby at her breast, she pointed to the table. "Look there," she almost shouted, "that's all she's give me. I broke a little dish, and she's stopped a shillin' out of my poor money. I told 'er I'd summons 'er for it, and she says, says she, 'Never you presume to come 'ere any more.' It's cruel, Ned, it's cruel. Only eighteenpence between us and starvation."

Ned swore frightfully. Thenceforward his hand should be against every man's, as every man's had been against him and his.

Next evening Chelsea Dick found him ready. Dick said, "I want your man, missis, to come with me to do

a job in the country. We must start to-night, as we have to begin work first thing in the morning. We may be away a week, or we may not ; but you'll expect 'im when you see 'im. Now Ned, let's see what tools you ought to take."

A very small kit sufficed ; a pair of pliers, a couple of chisels, and a small can of oil, were all Ned took in his carpet-bag—that wonderful kind of bag, with the leaden eyelet-holes, affected by his craft.

They went first to Dick's house, where Ned said, " I must have something of the nature of a crowbar." Dick showed him a beautiful steel jemmy, jointed and capable of being carried in the pocket. Crape for the face and a dark lantern completed the outfit.

" Skellington keys, Ned ?" said Dick, when they were on the way. " Lor' bless yer ! we don't want no skellington keys. We don't mind spilin' the furniture a bit, not we, in my mansion. All we wants is James 'ere," he continued, slapping his pocket.

It was after ten o'clock when they started, but they did not intend to walk there. Dick showed two half-crowns of which he had become the possessor. Ned proposed a drink, but to this Dick demurred on account of the business in hand. " I've got a little drop in this here bottle," said he, " as we'll 'ave later on."

They took an omnibus to Tottenham Court Road, and then from Euston went by train to Harrow. Here they alighted. Just outside the station, Odell made another attempt to enter a public-house, named " The Case is Altered." " No, you don't," said Dick. " Do you want to leave a scent there for the bobby to follow us by ? We'll get as drunk as you like when the job's done, but not a drop 'ere. Wot did I say to yer when we started ?"

" Yes, Dick, but ' the case is altered.' Look at the sign."

" Shut up, you fool ; your case will be altered if you goes inside there ; an' so I tell yer. Come along."

Presently they left the road, and made their way across some fields into a grassy lane, where they sank

every step up to the ankles in the soft ground. Finding a dry place under the hedge, they sat down to await the proper time for their attempt. Chelsea Dick produced some thick sandwiches of fat bacon, and a flat bottle. He had also a supply of tobacco. Soon a distant clock struck twelve.

"We'll have lots of the ready before that sounds again," remarked Dick.

"Yes, if——" said Ned.

"If! There's no ifs about it, my gay young workman."

After an hour and a half of weary waiting, they at length arose. Dick lighted the lantern. They made their way silently out into the road, where a light was seen coming slowly along in the distance. "Our friend Robert," remarked Dick; "we won't pass the time o' night with him." They slipped over a gate and cowered behind the hedge, whilst the unsuspecting guardian of the public weal sauntered past.

Leading the way through the shrubbery surrounding a moderately large house, they made their way without any difficulty to the back.

They stopped outside a large French window. Producing the lantern, they flashed its light into the room, the blind of which was not drawn down.

"Yes," whispered Ned; "I can work it easy. See that little rising under the carpet? that's the flap. It works on a hinge, and has a spring to make it stand up. Underneath is a knob, and when any one steps inside the door on the flap, down it goes, and the knob touches another, and then the bell starts a-ringing."

Stooping down, he examined the brickwork under the stone step of the door. As is nearly always the case, it consisted of just a few bad bricks laid loosely under a stone slab. With a chisel and his fingers he easily drew one out, leaving an opening. "Now the jemmy." Dick produced and unfolded it. Inserting it in the hole under the step, it slid underneath the flap without any difficulty, so that a man standing on the end projecting outside could keep the flap from giving under the step

of any one entering. This preliminary work completed, Dick opened the window in a few seconds and stepped inside. Safe across the flap, he held out his hand for the jemmy, which Ned took out and handed to him. "Now stand by and listen yer hardest," Dick whispered. "An' no runnin' away till I come out, or I'm done for." Ned nodded. Dick, looking round the room, selected a few small articles, and handed them to Ned outside, who put them in a sack. Dick then handed Ned his boots, and went out at the door communicating with the interior of the house.

Skelton had lost no time in taking possession of his inheritance. On the very day his victim Bowman was taken to Rutland Park like so much carrion, he, with his womenkind, had moved into his uncle's house.

It was not a very large place, but was a modern-built red-brick house, sufficiently pretentious to take the fancy of a man of his uncle's stamp.

Mrs. Skelton at once assumed the airs of a county personage. Anastasia tried to follow suit. They went to church the very next day, Sunday, in a carriage of the late owner's, with such state as they had never enjoyed before. Skelton lay in bed till noon; and in the evening, after swearing at large that it was the dullest place to spend Sunday in he had ever known, he took himself off to London. Not having a club, he went to the Grand Hotel, and came home duller than when he went, after not speaking to a soul except the waiter.

On the Monday, whilst Mrs. Skelton and Anastasia were gratified by the opportunity of patronizing the curate and his wife who called, he went off to town again, and turned up very drunk at a glove fight, where he was noticed by Chelsea Dick, who was hanging about.

Dick asked him if he would like to have a few lessons in boxing. Skelton hiccuped his willingness, and favoured the pugilist with his name and address. Dick turned up at Stanmore next morning to give him a

lesson, and found his new patron unable to come up to time ; a bad cold had reduced our foxy friend to a pitiable object. The man of battles contrived to explore the premises, but did not succeed in exploiting Skelton's pocket as he had hoped to do. Later on the same day he visited Ned Odell, with the result we are aware of.

On the Wednesday, Skelton was a glorious object indeed. His sharp nose was redder than ever. Its very sharpness seemed accentuated. His mother, however, insisted on his shedding his dressing-gown and appearing at dinner, during which there was a row about the curate.

"I have written to-day to ask them to dine here to-morrow," Mrs. Skelton remarked. "They shall see, Robert, that we at least know how to treat the clergy, however the vulgar people about here may fail to notice them."

"Why the dickens can't you consult me, mother, before you go doing that sort of thing? How the mischief am I to sit through the evening with a beggarly parson? I won't show, and so I tell you."

"You'll have to, Robert," exclaimed his sister.

"Have to, miss? And pray, who are you talking to? And pray, who are you talking to? I expect I am going to be master in the Firs, anyhow. Is this house yours or mine, I should like to know?"

"Now, Anastasia, there's no need to vex him," said his mother.

"I am not aware that I said anything particularly calculated to vex Robert," the young lady rejoined with acidity.

"Oh, didn't you?" sneered Skelton. "You can keep your nastiness for the curate and his wife, but don't treat me to it."

Skelton had lately been remarkably free with allusions to the phrase he had overheard in the chop-house. Anastasia rose and made for the drawing-room, with her nose in the air.

When she had gone, Mrs. Skelton carefully refrained from mentioning the curate again, but her son was so

very ready to take offence that in a very short time she left him.

The ci-devant bank clerk swore to himself after his mother's departure, and made love to the port.

He had not been alone more than a quarter of an hour, when the parlour-maid announced that a lady had called to see him on particular business.

"Tell her I am ill."

"So I did, sir, but she says she has come from town on purpose, and can't leave. It's a very urgent matter."

"What is she like, Andrews? Did she give no name?"

"Well, sir, she has been a nice-looking lady in her time, but she is not so young as she once was, so she wears a veil," the maid pertly replied.

"Oh, you women!" said Skelton, now more than half drunk, knocking his glass over as he hastily rose with the intention of kissing Miss Andrews, who retreated.

"She's pretty, I'll bet a bottle, and drink it myself, lose or win—so here goes."

He marched into the drawing-room to find himself confronted with—Mrs. Looker.

Mrs. Looker rose and lifted her veil. "I wish to know, Mr. Skelton, what you have done with my husband."

"Your husband!" stammered Skelton after a pause. "My dear Mrs. Looker, don't you remember we buried him?"

"I know all about that and what was really done with him, quite as well as you do. I want to know where he is now. What has become of the Insurance Policy?"

"As for the Policy, I burnt it," Skelton replied. "But I know nothing of your husband. Is he not at Livadia Lodge?"

"He was this morning, as you know well, but he has disappeared since noon. You have made away with him. It is not enough for you to have cheated us, you whom he trusted as an honourable man and a friend; you who abandoned him directly your own difficul-

ties were smoothed away; you who are as much to blame as anybody;—but you have taken away his insensible form lest you should be discovered; lest he should take that vengeance on you he assuredly would have done. You have killed him, and I will kill you.” Mrs. Looker towered above the man before her as she uttered her accusation, and Skelton visibly shrank. He recovered himself almost immediately.

“This is some new plot, Mrs. Looker. I tell you at once that I do not intend to be the victim of any black-mailing operations. I have been the dupe of you and your husband, but I do not mean to play that part again.”

“It is nothing of the kind. My husband’s body has indeed disappeared to-day. Oh tell me where he is,” she pleaded, “and I will trouble you no more.”

Skelton’s natural brutality showed itself as Mrs. Looker’s mood changed.

“I tell you,” he cried, “I have not left the house to-day. I know nothing of him, and I want to know nothing of him, or of you either. I beg to wish you good evening.”

Mrs. Looker faced him once more. She was ashen to the lips. Her mourning dress accentuated the pallor of her face. She might have been dead, but for the hate that gleamed from her eyes.

“Robert Skelton,” she said slowly, but with terrible meaning, as she raised her arm and pointed towards him. “You are a false friend, a coward, a cheat, a murderer. I swear to God that I will never rest till I have brought you to the gallows.”

She turned and left the house without another word. Skelton was transfixed with fear. He staggered back into the dining-room, and poured himself out a glass of brandy. It was midnight before he moved. He went to bed, but not to sleep. “Murderer!” he thought. A face rose up before him in the dark. But it was not Looker’s face he saw, it was Bowman’s, with blood-drenched hair. He closed his eyes to shut out the ghastly vision. He opened them again and screamed

with fright. A beam of light shot across the room, and a black face was bending over him within an inch or two of his own. He thought it was Satan himself.

"Hold your row, you blasted young fool," Satan growled; "another word and this will be between yer ribs."

"This" was a carving-knife brought from the pantry. Skelton's teeth chattered. He could not speak.

Satan, placing the carving-knife between his teeth, seized Skelton by the throat; this compelled him to open his jaws, then the demon rapidly stuffed a sock, which he had snatched from the floor, into the victim's mouth.

A door was heard to open, and a slippered foot to approach. In an instant Satan turned the key.

"Robert, what is the matter?" cried his mother, trying the door.

Satan snored vigorously in reply.

"Dreaming, I suppose," thought Mrs. Skelton, as she shuffled off again to her room.

Satan's next proceeding was to drag Skelton out of bed. That worthy resisted, dreading abduction to regions unmentionable. A display of the carving-knife reduced him to compliance.

The next move was the binding of Skelton's arms round his waist with his own braces. Having thus equipped him for his journey below, Satan then, by way of making his progress difficult, tore off a strip from the blanket and fastened it round his legs. He kicked the trembling wretch into a corner, and opened the draws with the keys he found in Skelton's pocket. He was rewarded by finding a large bundle of bank notes. He possessed himself of Skelton's watch and rings, and the loose money lying on the dressing-table, and withdrew, locking the door behind him. Downstairs, Satan, alias Chelsea Dick, found Ned Odell waiting for him. The jemmy was handed out, the flap adjusted, the passage made, the swag arranged, and the pair went off, taking the road towards Harrow Weald.

CHAPTER XII.

"ROGUES FALL OUT."

As Chelsea Dick and Ned Odell made the best of their way along the road, Dick related to his companion, with great gusto, the scene which had taken place in Skelton's bedroom. "I locked him in and left him to enjoy himself. Won't 'e look pretty in the mornin'?" he concluded.

"Wot about the key?" asked Odell.

"Why, dash my wig, if I ain't left it in the lock!" Dick replied. "'E'll be kickin' up old 'Arry's delight, an' they'll go an' let 'im out. They'll be after us before we know where we are."

"Wot's to be done?" asked Odell, ruefully.

Dick pondered a moment. His pugilistic experiences came into his mind.

"Why, get into the next county; they can't follow you there without a warrant."

They turned off to the right before reaching Pinner Station, and walked two or three miles on the way to Watford. Then they turned aside and, crossing some fields, got into the middle of a group of hayricks.

"Best stop 'ere a while," said Dick, "an' reckon up which way we are going to get back to town. The further we goes now, and the wuss for us."

They had plenty to drink but nothing left to eat, so they would take a smoke whilst they had the country to themselves. They drained the bottle, Dick taking by far the largest share, which in his hunger and excitement had a speedy effect upon him. They filled their pipes. Dick had the matches. They were at the bottom of his pocket, and he had hastily thrust the notes in on the top of them. After a search he recollected where he had placed his lights, took out the notes and laid them on the ground beside him. It was still dark, and the young moon had set long before the robbery was committed. As he struck the match the

gleam of it revealed the white paper, and Odell pounced upon the bundle.

"Luck again, Dick. This 'ere is my findin's, nothink to do with this bloomin' partnership."

"I tell yer it's mine; I laid it down just 'ere when I got out them matches," Dick excitedly maintained.

"Then you nailed it along o' the rest to-night. Fair doin's, Dick—I'll see wot it is."

Dick snatched at it, but Odell was too quick, and held it behind his back.

The pugilist, knowing that it amounted to a large sum, and quarrelsome in his cups at the best of times, as became a fighting man, was furious. He aimed a heavy blow at Odell in the dark and missed him.

Odell laughed and said, "Easy, Dick my boy; you don't 'ave it all your own way this time."

Chelsea Dick's rage became ungovernable; he drew the carving-knife from his pocket. "Now give it up," he fiercely demanded. Odell made no answer. He grinned to himself, but Dick could not see that in the gloom.

"Then d——n you, take that," cried Dick, plunging the knife into Odell's stomach, drawing it out with a downward sweep.

The wound was a frightful one. Odell fell over at once, literally ripped up, and was dead in half a minute.

Dick became sober immediately and hurriedly lighted the lantern. He went to Odell's side; but it was plain he was dead. After a moment's thought he picked up the knife and thrust it as far as he could into the ground. Putting his foot on the end of the handle he forced it completely into the earth, and stamped upon the place where it had disappeared. Then he secured the notes, and, with the watch and money in his pocket, leaving the rest of the plunder as too great an impediment, he struck off across country toward the southwest.

Skulking along under hedges, and hiding whenever any one came in sight, he arrived the following evening

at Staines, and there obtained some food which enabled him to continue his journey. He finally limped into his house just before dawn on the following morning.

Had he been half a dozen hours later he would have found the police awaiting him. As it was, he threw himself on the bed and fell into a deep sleep. He awakened to find three policemen in the room and the handcuffs on his wrists.

Skelton stood in the corner of his room, paralyzed with fear, for more than half an hour after Chelsea Dick left him. At last he contrived to roll himself towards the door. Gagged and bound and hampered as he was, it was with extreme difficulty that he raised himself into a kneeling posture. Then he threw himself against the door, striking it again and again with his shoulder. In a few moments Mrs. Skelton was aroused by the noise. Once more she came along the passage to her son's room. "Robert, what is it?" she cried. The knocking continued, accompanied by a strange grunting. Mrs. Skelton was alarmed, and went to call her daughter. Together they approached the room.

"See, the key is on the outside, mother," Anastasia exclaimed, "and it is turned."

Mrs. Skelton whispered hoarsely as the grunting continued. "Your brother has been murdered; listen to his groans."

"Then he can't be dead, mother; let us go in at once."

They opened the door, and the light Mrs. Skelton carried revealed the victim of Chelsea Dick's pleasantry, lying on the floor. His mother proceeded to release him.

"Oh, Robert, what has happened?" she asked, when the sock was at last extracted from his mouth.

"It was the devil, mother; I saw him—Satan himself."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Skelton, looking round the ransacked room. "There have been burglars here. Anastasia, rouse the servants!"

Robert by this time was presentable, and Anastasia and the maids crowded into the room. Looking around, Skelton speedily discovered his loss. "They have taken my money," he cried.

"How much, Robert?" gasped his mother.

"About fifteen hundred pounds' worth of notes. Confound the fellow! And my watch is gone!"

"Robert," said his sister, "there is no time to lose, come with me to the police station at once."

They started, Robert gaining courage under the protection of his sister.

They did not go very far before they met the member of the Metropolitan force, whose duty it was to patrol that neighbourhood. That officer will no doubt recollect well the events of the early morning of the twenty-second of September last year.

He accompanied them back to "The Firs," and, after a short examination, left to give warning at the police station.

Men were sent out along the roads. After daybreak the country was scoured in every direction, but it was not till near noon that a labourer, not a policeman, found Odell's body lying amongst the haystacks.

His bag was there, with his name scratched on the eyelet-hole. Early next morning he was identified. It is not very difficult to trace an artizan in London, if he is at all known in his trade.

Mrs. Odell made no difficulty about revealing in whose company Ned had left home, but she stoutly denied his ever having anything to do with a burglary. Nor did the police know anything of him; he had never been in prison in his life.

It was quite another matter with Chelsea Dick, who had "done time" and had figured at several of the police courts. His dwelling, once Mrs. Odell had mentioned his name, was found without difficulty. The barman at the "Gamecock" had his address, and by noon the murderer was safely lodged in the cells.

The notes were found in his room with the other

property, and taken, as *pièces de conviction* in a murder case, to Scotland Yard.

Skelton, on being sent for, immediately identified the watch and rings, but by this time had decided to disclaim all acquaintance with the notes.

His reason was plain enough to you who are in the secret of his proceedings. The numbers of the notes had been advertised as having been stolen from the Bank by the missing Bowman. Altogether, on thinking the matter over, Skelton felt pretty comfortable about them, though he now considered he had made a grievous mistake in not destroying them before. At first he had thought of doing so when he destroyed the wallet and the bills, but refrained. It was no mere forgetfulness that caused him to keep them by him, but a sheer dislike to seeing bank notes—money—*burnt*; when there were so many ways of getting rid of them to advantage. He was contemplating a little trip on the Continent with a friend of his who lived at Putney, and thought to find a way of trading them away—he had heard of such things—in the good city of Paris.

The officer of the Criminal Investigation Department with whom Skelton had had his interview was a thin, hatchet-faced man, with a scanty black beard—the kind of individual, so far as his demeanour went, you would expect to find as master in a national school, the creature of a tyrannical vicar. To him in his little room presently enters our friend the fat inspector, a jolly, red-faced, side-whiskered, bald-headed man whose appearance belied his name, which was Cross.

“I can’t make out this Stanmore business, Cross,” observed the dark man.

“Can’t make it out? It’s as plain as the Nelson column! Why, Nangle, look here my boy, we’ve got one of the men who did it, and found the swag in his possession. The other is dead, and the living man has the rope round his neck.”

“That’s all very well, but here’s Mr. Skelton been a quarter of an hour ago, and he says he knows nothing of these notes.” Nangle, as he spoke, laid his hand on

them lying on his desk. "There isn't a doubt that they are those stolen from Baigent's by that young clerk Bowman who absconded, and has never been heard of from that day to this. I've been looking up the case, and these numbers correspond. Nobody can be found who saw Bowman after that day. You perhaps remember he was thought to have left the country. It's my opinion he did nothing of the kind. You may take your oath Chelsea Dick got hold of him. Made away with him most likely. Bowman didn't rob the Bank; Dick robbed him."

"Hum. There may be something in that; but what should a cracksman be doing carrying these notes about in his pocket? Let me look at the register," asked Inspector Cross.

"The first thing we've got to do, I reckon," continued Nangle, slowly and thoughtfully, "is to look up Chelsea Dick's doings that 8th of September. Find out where he and anybody he was with lived, or any quiet place they went to or had access to, and search for the young clerk's body. That's what I'm going to do."

"Now for once in a way I should like to have a finger in this pie myself," said Cross. "Look here," and he ran his finger down the page in the register book. "Baigent's account of the robbery gives us their list of clerks, and who was at business that day. Here's the name of Skelton, 'absent through indisposition.' That has given me a notion. You know my theory, 'look up the unlikely hints.' This is an unlikely hint, one would think, but it's likely there's something in it when the notes turn up amongst swag from Skelton's house. I'll keep my eye on that chap; you can follow out your own notion if you like."

"Nonsense, Cross! The man has become a man of property. You old-fashioned chaps are always finding some mare's nest. There's too much of the astute dramatic kind of officer about you. None of your sort ever caught anybody out, outside a play or a novel."

"Well, you go your way, Nangle, and I'll go mine.

To-morrow is Sunday, my day off. I'll devote it to Mr. Skelton. You would be no use there, anyhow; he's seen you. What is he like—you won't mind helping me to that, I suppose?"

For answer Nangle took up half a sheet of note-paper, and in five minutes had drawn an excellent pen-and-ink likeness of Skelton. It was his ability to sketch any one he had seen that had first drawn attention to the quiet-looking policeman, and got him into Scotland Yard. He added a few words of description at the foot of the drawing, and handed it to Cross.

"Much obliged, I'm sure," said the latter. "When you are a great man I'll have this little bit of your handiwork to show as a curiosity. It's no use going to Baigent's to-day, Saturday afternoon; they've all gone home by this time. I must read up the case in that register." He took the book and went to a desk, where he made himself master of all the facts of the robbery.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. SKELTON CONTEMPLATES MATRIMONY.

WHILST Skelton was a clerk, Sunday had been to him the day of days. True, there were no music-halls and theatres open, but there was no bank open either, and Skelton was his own master, able to do as he liked. No clock reminded him on Sunday morning that he was the slave of another, and must be in that other's den, making money for a master, by a certain hour. That day he was free, a gentleman at large.

When he shook Sir Samuel Baigent's fetters off his limbs, and entered into the enjoyment of his uncle's money, Skelton found Sunday a desperately hard day to get through. In the morning the difficulty did not seem so very great. Breakfast in bed, and an hour with the *Sporting Times*, helped him along till midday.

But lying in bed, now that he could indulge in it every day, was becoming rather monotonous.

Sunday the twenty-fifth of September was a dull day. As Skelton looked out of his bedroom window he foreboded rain. What was he to do? To stay in the house was impossible. "Parsons to lunch," thought Skelton with disgust. Somehow, since the robbery, every servant about the place seemed inclined to break out into a snigger when she saw her master. They knew all about the condition to which the devil had reduced him, as servants always do know everything. The new footman had arrived the night before, and Skelton had overheard Miss Andrews letting him into the secret.

"Sure to rain; no use to go to town. I'll go over to the hotel and order myself a nice little dinner. Lots of people there on Sundays: no end of pretty girls, Jones said; that's the very thing." He accordingly made his way there and commanded his repast.

Having done so, he began to regret it, for the sun came out and shone all the afternoon. But a dinner ordered had to be paid for, therefore Mr. Skelton was steadfast in his determination to eat it. "Nobody shall get any more money out of me for nothing," was a maxim he had set before himself to live up to in his new life. It was the first shadow of a principle he had ever started. He treasured it and admired himself accordingly for it.

After mooning about the park all the afternoon, he went indoors to his dinner. Taking a good stare round the room, he seated himself at the table. He was gazing up at the painted ceiling overhead, when a waiter requested him to move as that table was engaged.

He was disgusted to find the people who had ousted him were an old woman, whose bonnet he tore earlier in the day, and her equally commonplace husband. He was consoled by hearing his name pronounced by a fat and pompous voice which he recognised immediately as that of Sir Samuel Baigent, his former employer.

Sir Samuel was all condescension.

"Ah, Skelton! is that you? How singular! We were just talking of you. In point of fact we were discussing the events that have made such a noise in this neighbourhood. Let me introduce you to my daughter. —Clara, this is Mr. Skelton who has been robbed. Waiter, this gentleman will dine at my table. Now you can tell us all about it. It is most remarkable that we should meet you here."

Several persons turned their heads and looked at Skelton. His name had appeared in all the newspapers in connection with the murder, and Skelton felt himself quite a personage.

But the commonplace husband of the lady with the torn bonnet did not turn his head. He contented himself with opening his ears, feeling perfectly well satisfied with the view of Mr. Skelton's countenance presented to him in the large mirror upon the wall opposite to him.

In one of those quiet little streets in Kentish Town, Inspector Cross inhabited an unpretentious little dwelling. None of the neighbours knew what he was. He was generally supposed, from hints dropped by his comfortable-looking wife to other comfortable ladies resident in Caversham Road, to be in a small way of business at the West End. From his frequent absences some thought him a commercial traveller. Others opined, because the telegraph boy frequently brought messages that sent Mr. Cross away in hot haste after business hours, that he must be an undertaker. Mrs. Cross, on being directly questioned on the subject, said that Mr. Cross often had to do with great families in the way of business. "Tip top, my dear, quite the cream of the cream," and that it "didn't do to talk."

Inspector Cross had a little money — rewards that he had earned from time to time. Some of it he had invested, but he always kept a hundred pounds or so, ready for any expenditure whenever he prosecuted a little investigation on his own account. Rewards do not always drop into detectives' mouths without a little

outlay. For some weeks the inspector had promised Mrs. Cross a jaunt into the country. He determined to go down to Stanmore the next day with his wife and combine pleasure with business.

"Now, Hetty," said he, as he finished his "meat tea," "what do you say to a little trip to Bentley Priory to-morrow?"

"Where's that, Alfred?"

"Why, it's right away at the other side of Harrow, near Stanmore. It's a big hotel now, like the 'Star and Garter,' a place where the swells go to dine. Queen Adelaide used to live there, and the Duke of Abercorn afterwards. It is quite a grand place, and now they have made it into a hotel."

"Won't it be very expensive, Alfred?"

"Oh, blow the expense; I ain't going to stick at a trifle when it's a question of giving the old woman a treat once in a way. Besides, it's partly a matter of business."

"But you won't want me then, Alfred," said the lady. "I should only be in your way."

"You can help me, Hetty, by going with me. Remember what a complete disguise it was for me, your going with me to Paris when I caught that chap Larkson. Not but what I had to leave you to come home by yourself."

"Ah, yes, that was fine, Alfred, all but the coming home, when I was so sick and 'ad all the luggage to look after, and me not knowing a word of the language."

"Well, you won't be sick this time, my dear. If the road is in good order and it doesn't rain, it will be delightful. We are going by coach. I've booked the places ready."

Mrs. Cross looked out her best dove-coloured silk, and put new strings to her white bonnet for the occasion. Next morning, when they sallied forth, they gave the neighbourhood the impression they were on their way to a wedding.

It required considerable effort on the inspector's part to get Mrs. Cross bestowed carefully on the roof of the

coach, but once there, she enjoyed herself amazingly. There was not too much dust to cause anxiety for the welfare of the white bonnet, and the inspector was the most attentive of husbands. He only failed that day in one respect: he left Mrs. Cross to view by herself Queen Adelaide's summer-house and the rest of the attractions, whilst he resorted to a little white public-house. When three o'clock came, having satisfied the landlord of the "Hare" that he was a traveller and given him a cigar, over a tumbler of "hot Scotch" the inspector extracted all the information the innkeeper possessed on the subject of the burglary at "The Firs."

"You see, sir, it was this a way," said Boniface. "Mr. Ivins, the gardiner up there, tells me, an' 'e was one of them as found the murdered man. There was two or more on 'em, and they circumwents the bells as old Jerry Skinflint—that's what they used to call his uncle—'ad put up hall hover the 'ouse so as they should ring if any 'ousebreakers comes. An' one on 'em, he dresses hisself up like the devil and goes and makes young Mr. Skelton give 'im all 'is money as 'e 'ad in a lot of Bank of Hengland notes. I mind when I was keepin' the 'Chequers' at Cambridge, as a feller once got hisself up like a minister an' priggged the silver cream-jug and sugar-tongs out of a hold woman's parlour."

Inspector Cross had let the landlord discourse without interruption. For himself, he was not particularly interested in the burglary, or the murder either, but he had already gleaned some most important information on the very matter that had brought him into that neighbourhood.

"And so he took all the poor young gentleman's money. Dear, dear," observed the inspector, "and how much might it be?"

"Why some says one thing and some says another, but it's thousands of pounds anyway, an' all in notes. Hit's that much as 'e won't own to it, they says now, but at first 'e was a-makin' a pretty to-do about it. 'E 'ad all the women servants in an' arsked them all the pertiklers of the robbery, sly-like, an' finds as they all

said wot a houtcry 'e 'ad made about 'is money, 'an then 'e tells 'em as it were a mistake an' they wasn't to say northen' about it to nobody."

Having learned all that he wanted to know for the present, Cross discharged the cost of his own and the landlord's liquor and took his way back to the hotel.

Walking leisurely about with his hat in his hand, for it was very hot, the detective looked the picture of a contented comfortable London tradesman. He found his wife waiting for him in an unwonted state of excitement.

"Just look here, Cross, at my best bonnet," she exclaimed as he came up. "One of those young whippersnappers has ruined it, regularly ruined it. My day's pleasure is completely spoilt. You ought not to have left me."

"Never mind, Hetty, I've done a fine stroke of business whilst I was away. Made a hundred pound as sure as if I had it in my pocket. You shall have a better bonnet for next Sunday."

"But what I want to know is what I am to do to-day. I am not fit to be seen. A new bonnet for next Sunday is all very well, but it's wanted now."

"Come, Hetty," said her husband, "a few pins will put that lace right for the present; don't put yourself out, my girl."

"A few pins won't mend my broken feather. That will have to come out, and it is such a beauty. Mrs. Jenkinson was only saying yesterday there isn't another like it ever enters the chapel doors."

"How did it happen?" asked Cross, hoping to soothe the lady by taking an interest in the business.

"Why, one of those young men with white spats on, a hop-o'-my-thumb sort of fellow with ginger hair and that sort of complexion that freckles, came and sat down beside me, just I believe to stare at those two young ladies sitting opposite. And he puts up his umbrella to save his precious skin just because the sun peeped out, and in less than a minute he dragged my bonnet half off, with one of the points of it. That's him, coming along there."

"I've seen that face before, I know," thought Cross. "Now where was it? I have it. It is the same fellow I saw at Baker's that day I went into the City about the Russian Bond case."

He considered a moment, trying to recall the circumstances. A detective is no use in his profession if he has not a memory for details which other people would overlook altogether.

"I remember," he said at last aloud. "He was vexed at some fellows in the next box joking about a Skelton. What a go if this is my man!"

His wife, who was accustomed to his soliloquies, made no remark.

As Skelton passed, his attention absorbed by the girls opposite, Inspector Cross took a mental photograph of him.

The good couple whiled away the rest of the afternoon on the terrace, gazing at the scene that poets have delighted in and kings and emperors have looked upon. Mrs. Cross forgot her spoilt bonnet in speculating why a deer should whisk its tail when it is feeding, and wishing she had a peacock in the back garden in Caversham Road.

At dusk they went in to dinner. As Mrs. Cross unfastened her bonnet-strings and cast them over her shoulders, she said, "That's him again; he had got our table. Who's he with now, I wonder?"

"Hush, my dear, I want to listen. This is first-class business, Hetty."

Presently a voice, unctuous and magisterial, sounded behind him. Cross knew it at once as that of Sir Samuel, and ceased to eat, lest he should miss a word.

"And so you have lost fifteen hundred in notes the *St. James's Gazette* says. I suppose you had only just received them and had no time to bank them?"

"That's quite a mistake, Sir Samuel; I can't imagine how it can have got into the newspapers."

"But the newspaper says, in point of fact," the banker continued, "that the notes were found on the murdered burglar."

"That might be, but they were not mine."

"How funny for a burglar to go about with fifteen hundred pounds on him, Mr. Skelton," said Miss Baigent.

Inspector Cross gently pressed his wife's foot under the table. She knew what he meant; she was to make a mental note of what she had just heard.

Skelton did not reply to the remark. He changed the subject. "How vulgarised these places become when they are thrown open. Those coaches bring all sorts of common people here."

Mrs. Cross felt distressed; she divined the remark was levelled at her.

Sir Thomas said somewhat loftily, "Well, as a matter of fact, my daughter and I came by the 'Defiance' to-day: still, as you say, these places do get vulgarised—in point of fact a—a—vulgarised."

"To think," said Miss Baigent, "of the place where Sir Walter wrote 'Marmion' being desecrated by tailors and chandlers. Are you fond of poetry, Mr. Skelton?"

"Devoted to it, Miss Baigent. So I should think was the man who hit on the idea of the hotel. 'Charge, Chester, charge,' must have suggested it."

No more being said with reference to the robbery, Inspector Cross took his wife into the drawing-room, and sought the office, where, after a little trouble necessitating the display of his warrant card, he negotiated the exchange of their seats on the coach that had brought them for two on the "Defiance."

As the coach drew up under the portico, Mrs. Cross saw in the glare of the electric light that it was not that by which they had come.

"Up with you, Hetty," her husband cried, after Sir Samuel and his daughter had ascended.

"But this is not our coach, Alfred."

"Never mind, we are going on this one at all events. I want to talk business with some one."

"Those horrid people again, papa," said Miss Baigent, loud enough for the Crosses to hear.

Mrs. Cross looked very uncomfortable, in fact not at all like herself. But checked by a look from her husband she made no remark.

As soon as they had passed the lodge and were out on the road, Cross moved over to the seat at Sir Samuel's left hand.

"I want a word with you, sir, on very particular business."

"And who may you be?" Sir Samuel asked contemptuously.

"Inspector Cross, of Scotland Yard. I have discovered the man who robbed the Bank, and we have most of the money too, I am glad to tell you."

"What! Found Bowman?" eagerly asked the banker, his whole manner changing.

"No, sir, not Bowman. We shall have to get a warrant for some one quite different. There is just a link or two of unimportant evidence wanting. When we have got it, then I can put my hand on the man at once. But it will be as well to have a warrant, in case he tries to quit the country."

"Who is it?" asked Sir Samuel.

"I will tell you that to-morrow, sir, when we meet at the Mansion House to get the warrant. What time can you be there, sir?"

"Three o'clock in the afternoon. I suppose this is quite true? In point of fact, that you are what you represent yourself to be?"

"Quite true, sir; I will show you my warrant card when we get amongst the lamps."

"Hetty, my dear," said the detective later on, as he took off his boots, to his better half, whilst that lady scrutinized her damaged bonnet, "I'll have the expenses of our little treat to-day out of Sir Samuel before I am many days older."

"Oh, Alfred, what a man you are! Now don't forget my bonnet."

See Skelton next day swelling with importance, rejoicing in his prosperity, proud of his abilities, and conceited of his merits. Was ever a man so conspicuously successful before? The elevation of Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse was slow indeed compared to the rise of Mr.

Skelton. Three weeks ago an insignificant clerk. And a clerk in difficulties to boot, with dreams at night of a policeman's hand upon his shoulder. Looked down upon and ordered about by men who would rejoice to have him sitting at their board to-day. Accustomed to be met with refusals from young ladies, at such little dances as he ever got invited to, in answer to his smirking question, "Might he have the pleasure?" Now he was owner of a fine estate, had money well invested, was master of a well-appointed mansion. How well he had surmounted his difficulties! What deliverances he had experienced! He felt himself quite a kind of Napoleon, favoured beyond other men, with the social world at his feet.

There was not a doubt about it, if he only played his cards reasonably well, he might marry Miss Baigent—the only daughter of a man reported to be worth two millions of money, and spoken of as likely to be made a peer. Mr. and the Honourable Mrs. Skelton—yes it would sound well, very well. But was it worth the restraints, the assumption of propriety which courtship of such a lady would involve? He did not look on matrimony as likely to necessitate any restrictions upon his conduct. Yes, on the whole it was worth while. Six months of fairly decent behaviour, that was all, and then he could do as he liked once more. Yes, a contemplated alliance with Miss Baigent seemed to give him that spur he needed, that excuse for breaking with a young person living at Putney, who was becoming a little more exacting, not to say greedy, since he had entered upon his inheritance. She was all very well whilst she had had to keep herself, and stand behind Corby and Dalton's counter; but now she had actually thrown up her situation, and expected him to keep her. What an ass he had been to give her that necklace and tell her it was a little commemoration of his having come into a fortune! It would never do for Sir Samuel to hear of her, that was certain. And then, again, he must get rid of her for his own comfort's sake.

Yes, he would do it at once. He would go down to Putney that very evening, and see if a little money would not make her see things in the proper light.

Such was the train of thought that passed through his mind as he watched the driving rain. He turned away from the window, and went to put on his evening things. What a nuisance it was living so far from town, and having to dress almost in the middle of the afternoon if he wanted to go anywhere. Happy thought! Why not take a bedroom at the Grand, and keep it for such occasions, till he had had time to look about him?

Skelton accordingly selected what he thought he should require, packed it up in a bag, and drove to the station. He easily arranged for a room at a weekly rate, and came down to dine in splendour.

White dress waistcoat, crimson silk handkerchief stuck in his bosom, pumps and white-spotted silk socks, quite a swell of the first water. When he had married Miss Baigent, and was quite a personage, Mr. Skelton had a few ideas on the reform of evening dress he would then carry out. For the present he put up with the ill-devised costume that others affected. In what served him for a soul Skelton was a born tailor.

He dined leisurely, and took rather more wine than usual to screw up his courage for the interview with the Putney lady, who was rather a difficult party to face.

At last he was assisted into his light coat, and strolled out into the entrance cigarette in hand.

It was still drizzling, and Skelton thought the atmosphere was rather blurred. He had intended going down by train, but he now thought he would drive.

"Get me a smart hansom," he ordered the commissioner

The cab was brought, and Skelton leisurely got in. He was in a strangely forgetful mood, his sharp manner seemed quite to have left him. Usually Skelton swore at his cabman as he told him where to go; to-night he never noticed the man at all. He was a smart, middle-aged, stout man, with short whiskers, to the ordinary

observer ; if Skelton had only looked at him, he would have gazed at him with no ordinary interest.

"Where to, sir?" asked the commissionaire.

"Upper Richmond Road, Putney," Skelton replied.

The words were overheard by another man whom Skelton had not noticed—Mr. Inspector Cross.

At the very time Skelton was indulging his imagination with a picture of his marriage with Miss Baigent, Cross was quietly disclosing to Sir Samuel the name of the man who had robbed him.

It was one of the inexorable rules of Sir Samuel's firm that if a clerk played any trick with the moneys of the Bank he must be prosecuted. No tears, no mother's prayers, ever got an embezzling clerk off. When he was caught, to the Old Bailey he went as a matter of certainty.

Sir Samuel recollected that there had been some irregular conduct on the part of that young gentleman, in connection with the account of one of his smaller customers. Skelton must be punished to strengthen the other clerks in the principles of rectitude as viewed from the Baigent standpoint ; so Inspector Cross left the Mansion House that afternoon with the name of Robert Wentworth Skelton on a warrant snugly lying in the breast-pocket of his frock-coat.

Early that morning a satellite of the inspector had gone to Stanmore to keep an eye on Skelton, and had followed him till he had seen him safely at dinner. Then he quietly slipped round to the Yard and reported to the inspector, who resolved to devote the evening to watching his quarry himself.

He had no intention of arresting him till his evidence was in a more perfect state, since he had as yet no idea at all as to how Mr. Skelton had got the notes. Possession of them was the only fact he could actually prove ; all the rest was no more than strong suspicion. To watch Skelton was the obvious way to complete the chain. The detective therefore had arranged that he should be kept under constant surveillance.

Hearing the address Skelton gave, Mr. Cross selected another hansom, and followed at a convenient distance.

BOOK IV.

RETRIBUTION.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BAD LOOK-OUT FOR THE LOOKERS.

WHATEVER the feelings with which Mrs. Looker had regarded her first husband the brigadier, those she entertained for her second were certainly warm and devoted. When the Colonel's mind was made up to take the fakir's drug on the first of September, he and his wife spent the three days that intervened between the time when he had his attack of *angina pectoris* and the appointed Thursday, as if they were on the eve of a long separation. They could not have been more tender to each other had he been going on dangerous service on the other side of the globe.

Again and again she begged him to reconsider his determination, but he was steadfast to it. He was a man of undoubted courage and of iron resolution. Having executed his will and given it to his wife, with many charges to keep a sharp look-out on Skelton, the remainder of his preparations were completed.

The apartment he had selected in which to lie hid after the funeral was a back-room at the top of the house, plainly and indeed meagrely furnished. An iron bedstead, a painted chest of drawers, a makeshift

toilet-table with a small looking-glass upon it; these, with a basin upon a tripod-stand, completed the furniture.

Reckoning up their resources, the Lookers found they were possessed of twenty-seven pounds between them. The Colonel handed twenty to his wife, and locked the other seven in a drawer in the painted chest. There were also deposited in the same receptacle a suit of clothes, a hat, a great-coat, boots, toilet necessities, a watch and chain, a Gladstone bag packed with other clothing, and a photograph of his wife.

"There, Amy," he said, as they looked into the drawers together, "I think I've got everything. Now mind, in twenty-one days I shall be all right again—perhaps sooner, for the paste may have lost some of its virtue with time. When I have been deposited here and the coffin filled and screwed up, keep the door fast locked. On the twentieth day pass the key under the door, that I may be able to let myself out of prison. I will write to tell you my whereabouts as soon as I have got safely out of this neighbourhood."

"Now, darling, let us have this luncheon; our last meal before the great event," he continued, as they went downstairs.

The Colonel had recurred several times to the grim notion he had alluded to on the Sunday afternoon of the fit, when he had said that knowing the hour of his death made him feel like going to be hanged. Just as a condemned man has a plentiful breakfast placed before him on the morning of his execution, so the Colonel had arranged for a sumptuous luncheon on this fateful day. It being the first of September, the gallant officer, who was a sportsman, naturally thought of partridges, and Mrs. Looker had bargained with her poulterer for a brace of birds to be sent early in the day.

At the end of the luncheon, as the Colonel filled his wife's glass and his own from a bottle of Heidsieck's dry Monopole, he sighed, and said:

"Poor little birds, to think they were running about in the furrows this day at dawn, and now their bones

are picked ! It's a very suggestive idea, Amy, isn't it ? ”

Mrs. Looker burst into tears.

“ Oh, Herbert, don't,” she sobbed. “ Think if anything goes wrong with you ! ”

“ Nothing can, my dear, unless the stuff fails altogether. Would you mind bringing me a cigar ? ”

Mrs. Looker went. The moment she had gone the Colonel took from his pocket a curious little silver box, and extracted from it an oval lozenge. It was soft, and externally black in colour. Looker bent it, so that it cracked and showed the interior, which appeared a bright green. He placed it in his mouth.

Mrs. Looker returned with a cigar-box. There were only two or three in the bottom of it.

The Colonel selected that which seemed most promising, and lighted it. He smoked in silence for a few minutes and fell asleep. His wife looked at him tenderly as he sat with his head thrown back, and presently started forward, alarmed at the extreme pallor of his face. She approached him. To all appearance he was dead.

The bell was rung, and the doctor summoned. He came, but could do nothing.

That afternoon the blinds were drawn down, and the neighbourhood knew that Colonel Looker was dead.

Mrs. Looker now experienced a period of the greatest anxiety. Much as she had thought of what was to take place, and was prepared beforehand, she yet was haunted by the fear that the Colonel might be really dead. She had not reckoned upon this uncertainty arising, and it wrought upon her all the more. Like her husband, she was brave, and fought against this dread. She was supported by one little circumstance.

Early in the evening she received a note by post, addressed to her in her husband's handwriting. Foreseeing that she might, after all, suppose him to be dead, he had written the note and posted it secretly, so that it might seem to come as a message from him after the event.

She read it a dozen times a day.

The programme arranged upon was duly carried out up to a certain point. Skelton and Mrs. Looker, with terrible exertion, managed to convey the Colonel's body to the room that had been prepared. The funeral duly took place. Skelton endeavoured to negotiate the Policy, but gave up the attempt at the first difficulty. His own windfall coming to him, he abandoned the Colonel to his fate like the selfish miscreant he was. As soon as he could he deserted Hampstead for Stanmore, and left Mrs. Looker in the lurch. One of his first acts at "The Firs" was to destroy the Policy.

"What luck!" he thought. "Bowman is disposed of; nobody can ever suspect me of that little affair. Looker is settled. He dare not, positively dare not show himself or make a sign, if even he *should* come round again, which I do not believe. And here am I, rich, safe, not a peril before me. Yet they say that it is only the good who thrive. Rubbish!"

Ah! Robert Wentworth Skelton, wait a bit; your turn is not come yet: but it will come for all that. There is a God above as well as the devil who inspired you.

Every day Mrs. Looker locked herself into the back room that contained so great a mystery.

She spent hours on her knees beside the bed. The servants often heard her weeping as they came curiously to the door. As the days went on she grew calmer. She was somewhat reassured by the fact that none of those changes that follow death seemed to occur in the Colonel's case; and daily as she knelt beside the couch she saw that his beard was growing. The smooth-shaven face, with the regulation moustache, was soon covered with a bristly growth. In little more than a fortnight the body seemed invested in a disguise.

The Colonel's apprehension as to the drug having grown weaker, and the time necessary for its complete action being therefore shortened, was realised. Mrs. Looker hit on the idea of dismissing the servants as the day of the revival approached, so as to have the coast clear. Why should not she and the Colonel leave

Hampstead together? On the twentieth of September, therefore, she got rid of her domestics, saying she was leaving for Scotland that evening. She spent that night alone in the house with her husband's body. Next day she was obliged to go out to make some necessary purchases. Her stock of money was getting low; the servants' wages had made a hole in it. "It can't last very long now," she thought. Mindful of the Colonel's instructions, she placed the key partly under the door, so that either he or she could reach it from the inside or outside as might be required.

A gleam of sunshine strayed across the floor of the room. As the minutes went on it moved, till at last the face of the silent figure lying on the bed was lighted up by it. Ghastly and untidy though that countenance looked with the beard sprouting half over it, yet it did not seem quite so much the face of a dead man as it did half an hour before, when Mrs. Looker glanced at it wistfully as she left the room. A slight dew seemed to be breaking out over it. As the sunshine brightened, the pallor seemed to change into a warmer shade. Presently the chest heaved, and the features puckered; a loud sneeze echoed in the half-empty room. The eyelids parted, then closed again, and for a few moments death seemed to have yielded his throne to his brother sleep. Soon the figure moved, the parched lips appeared as if trying to express a little moisture from each other. Colonel Looker turned his head on the pillow; he was awake and back again in the world.

He passed an attenuated hand beneath his pillow, evidently seeking for his watch. It was not there. He stiffly raised his head and looked about him, blinking in the unaccustomed light. An air of vacant surprise, followed by an expression of recollection, passed over his countenance. In half a minute he seemed to have recalled the circumstances of his situation. He struggled with difficulty into a sitting posture.

"Heaven and earth! how stiff I am," he thought. "How my back does ache, and how cold it is." He

threw off the bed covering that had been lightly laid over him, and proceeded to rub his legs. They refused to move. "What's this?" He reached down towards his feet and a smile came over his face—a very stiff and wooden smile—as he discovered his feet were tightly tied above the ankles with a napkin. "What fools those undertakers are, to tie a dead man as if he were a violent prisoner!" With much difficulty he unfastened the knot, and chafed his feet. Presently they began to tingle with "pins and needles" that seemed red-hot.

He sat on the side of the bed, trying in vain for some time to stand up, falling back on each attempt. At last he succeeded. Clinging to the bed, he crawled from the side of it to the foot, and then back again to sit awhile in his former place. Reaching down his hand, he next groped between the edges of the mattresses, and found a small key. With this he staggered a couple of paces to the chest of drawers, and took from thence a flask, to which he placed his lips. The draught made a new man of him; he stood firmly on his legs. Opening another drawer, he partly dressed himself in the clothing he found there, and then sat down again. Another drink, and he walked steadily enough to the dressing-table and surveyed himself in the glass.

"A nice-looking fellow you are indeed, Looker my boy," he remarked, as he passed his hand across his chin. "You are 'Filthy Looker' now, there is no doubt about that, whatever you were in the old days."

"What an ass I was," he continued, "not to have arranged for an *Ætna* or something of that kind. How the mischief am I to get that beard off without any hot water?"

He took out the razors and other things, and then went to the door and sought for the key. "It's there all right," he said. "She's a woman in a thousand."

After some little consideration he took a pair of scissors and cut off his moustache. Then he soaped his face and began to wield the razor. His weak and

shaking fingers inflicted a cut upon his chin the moment he laid the blade upon it. The time spent in stopping the blood and in taking another draught from the flask steadied them somewhat. He lathered again and commenced to scrape once more.

It was full twenty minutes before the job was finished, and he beheld himself garnished with a pair of short and bristly side-whiskers. "Just like Tom Cluny, my old groom," he said. "By Jove, if I were not a man with nine thousand pounds, I might do worse than turn groom. I hope that fellow Skelton has done that business properly. Sure to; a thousand pounds is not to be picked up every day."

There was plenty of water in the jug, and he proceeded to indulge in a liberal wash. "A tub, I suppose," said he, "is not to be thought of under the circumstances."

Having finished his dressing, he softly opened the door. Not a sound came from below. He leant over the banisters and listened intently. Still all was quiet. Then he ventured in the adjoining room and rang the bell, slipping back with unexpected activity into his own apartment; he locked the door and waited. Not a footstep. "There can't be a soul in the house," he said. He came out again upon the landing. After a minute had passed he ventured down the first flight of stairs. Nobody was about. "Couldn't be better. I'm off at once," he thought. Ascending to the room he had tenanted so long, he put his money into his pocket, took his hat and coat and bag, and then made his way out by the back garden into a high walled lane running behind the row of villas. There he began to feel faint and took another pull at the flask, emptying it this time.

A dirty-looking four-wheeler was passing the end of the lane. He hailed it, and drove off to the Euston Hotel. There he ordered dinner, and entered his name as Habakkuk Lincoln, of Boston, U.S. Then he went into the billiard-room and sent the marker for a cigar. With that between his lips the Colonel felt himself again.

After dinner it occurred to him that, as nobody was at Livadia Lodge, obviously the wise thing to do was

to explore it, and see if there was any message left there for him.

He put off doing so till later, and sat at the window of the bedroom he had taken, wearily watching the cabs roll out from under the archway and into the great station beyond. "I'll have a paper," he thought. He went into the station and purchased a *Globe*. To his surprise it was dated Wednesday, the twenty-first. "I've got the pull of that Roman Emperor fellow," he chuckled; "I'm a day to the good, at all events."

The newspaper and a few more smokes and a glass of whisky brought him on to eleven o'clock, when he turned up the collar of his great-coat and went into the station once more. There he hired another cab, a hansom this time; he dismissed it within a few minutes' walk from his house.

There was no light in any of the windows of Livadia Lodge as he walked up to the door. "What an ass I am," he said; "I've no key to open the door with." He was standing irresolutely on the steps, when another cab drove up, and a veiled figure descended from it.

"Amy, my darling!" exclaimed the Colonel, as she approached. She fell into his arms.

"Oh, Herbert!" was all she could say.

Cabby drove off, saying to himself, "London life! London life! Wot a world it is, to be sure!"

Mrs. Looker had a key. It was inserted into the lock.

"I've sent the servants away, dear; isn't it lucky? I've so much to tell you," she said, as he swung back the door.

An odour of foul tobacco saluted them. They sniffed the unpleasant atmosphere. As they stood in doubt, there came the sound of a footstep stumbling along the kitchen passage towards the hall.

"Hallo!" cried the Colonel, "who are you, my man?" as a dilapidated individual, whose greasy habiliments were topped by an old silk hat, came into view, holding a tallow candle stuck into one of the Colonel's best plated bedroom candlesticks.

“ ‘Who am I?’ Why who are *you*, I want to know? I knows this lady, but who may you be?’ ”

“ I am Mrs. Looker’s brother,” he replied, with a warning look at his wife.

“ An’ I’m the man in possession for Stubbings and Grimshaw. There’s a matter of four hundred and nineteen pounds agin the late Colonel Looker. P’r’aps you’ve got it with yer, sir? ”

“ No, indeed, I have not. Let me look at the paper.”

The Colonel scanned it; it was in proper form. He turned to his wife.

“ The best thing you can do, Amy, is to put a few things together, and come with me to my hotel.”

“ I suppose,” he said, addressing the bailiff, “ you do not object to my sister taking a little necessary clothing with her? ”

“ No, not if it’s just clothing; but I must see wot it is.”

Mrs. Looker had to suffer the indignity of being followed by the dirty individual into her bedroom. He and the Colonel stood by whilst she selected a few articles of clothing. The man objected to their taking a leather bag to put them in.

“ Why, you know as well as I do,” remonstrated the Colonel, “ that your bill of sale only covers the furniture.”

“ I’ve got that bag in the inventory; you can’t have it now. You must argy that out with the boss to-morrow.”

A brown paper parcel was made up, and, with this, they presented themselves again at the hotel. The night porter eyed them narrowly, but let them pass.

Upstairs the Colonel remarked, “ I was afraid that fellow was not going to let you in, Amy.”

“ By the way, dear, you are now Mrs. Lincoln, of Boston—that is my travelling name at present.”

Next day Mrs. Looker related Skelton’s perfidy. The Colonel’s rage was frightful.

“ Why, Amy,” he almost shouted, “ we are beggars. The pension is *gone*, absolutely GONE! What is to be done? I’ll have my money or the rascal’s blood.”

Calmer reflection showed him that the money was out of the question. He could not claim the proceeds of the Policy, as he was not dead. The only way was to threaten Skelton, and hope it might lead to something. Looker gave the I.O.U., which he had carefully retained, to his wife, and sent her to a solicitor to instruct him to press Skelton for the amount on her behalf as Looker's widow. He dare not appear himself, so she had to go up alone to Livadia Lodge for her clothing. Later in the day the evening papers contained an account of the burglary at Stanmore. The Lookers thought it very pleasant reading.

Next evening a note arrived from the solicitor containing a cheque for twenty pounds. Skelton would admit no liability for the I.O.U., but hearing Mrs. Looker was in poor circumstances, he was glad to make her a donation of twenty pounds. Mrs. Looker indignantly sent it back to the lawyer, with instructions to return it to Skelton. They counted over the money they had between them—it amounted to eleven pounds odd! Never were two people in such a predicament before. They dare not make themselves known. The hotel was an expensive one; the first thing they did was to ask for their bill and discharge it. Nine pounds remained. The Colonel went out and found lodgings in Drummond Street close by. Such a place to take a lady to. They entered upon them with brave hearts.

Next morning the Colonel put his pride in his pocket, and went down to Lord Shrewsbury's stables, and engaged himself as a cabman. A visit to Scotland Yard followed, where he obtained his driver's license and badge from our friend Inspector Cross. Both applicant and police officer had their minds full of one name—Skelton. When the Colonel returned with the badge and told his wife, in the frowsy room, what he had been doing, he was hardly prepared for the scene that followed. Mrs. Looker was not a weeping woman as a rule, but surely no cabman's badge was ever before so watered by a lady's tears.

CHAPTER XV.

NEMESIS ON A HANSOM.

THE day when Colonel Looker first went out with his hansom cab was not by any means calculated to inspire a despondent man with cheerfulness. It was wet and cheerless, and Looker had not yet by any means recovered from his long fast. Another thing that tended to make him ill at ease was that Lord Shrewsbury's manager had directed him to take up his position in a rank that was very near the clubs. Again and again the ex-officer saw old comrades in arms making their way past his stand. It was some time before he had worked his way to the end of the rank and was next on turn for a fare. In the interval he had gone into the shelter. A man used to the ways of soldiers, he thought he could easily put up with the companionship of cabmen. But a soldier is compelled to be clean; a cabman has not much time to devote to attentions to his person, and the proximity of one or two of the older and dirtier drivers was not at all pleasant. A very short time enabled Looker to decide that he preferred the rain outside. His first fare was a betting man, who left him with a bad shilling. He had four more jobs before dark, and, after nine hours of it, found his receipts came to seven and ninepence—just about half the sum he had to hand in at the office at the close of his day. When he got his second horse and the streets were lighted up, then the waterman told him he might expect business to improve.

Shortly after eight o'clock he was called to the Grand Hotel, and at once recognised Skelton as the man who was to be his new fare. Looker had hardly turned his horse's head towards the west, before he had resolved upon a plan of action. He would make Skelton smart for his misdeeds, in mind, body, and estate. One of Looker's difficulties was his imperfect acquaintance with the topography of out-of-the-way neighbourhoods.

The Fulham Road, however, presented no difficulties to him, and he drove away with his hat on one side to the manner born.

Mr. Skelton's courage, heightened by the wine he had taken, began to evaporate as the evening grew chilly. He by no means felt that degree of self-confidence with which he had soliloquized in the morning. As he would have expressed it himself, he began to feel "regularly down on his luck." And it was the fact, that from the moment he entered Looker's cab the luck which had attended Skelton thus far deserted him. Misfortunes followed each other in terribly quick succession. The first was a mere trifle. Looker, in pursuit of his determination to make his fare smart, tried, for some little time without success, to cast his whip-lash round the corner into Skelton's face. Most of us know the irritation produced by this tender attention on the part of cabby. At last he contrived to curl the lash cleverly into the corner of Skelton's eye. The torrents of blasphemy that followed must be left to the imagination. Skelton poked up the lid in the roof with his stick, and his language, though not at all complimentary, conveyed a measure of joy to the Colonel's heart, for it showed him that his little preliminary attempt was successful.

"Beg pardon, I'm sure," he growled through the lid. "Would you like the glass down, sir?"

Before Skelton could answer, the glass came rattling down on the back of the hand he was holding on the door in front of him.

Skelton swore again. "I say," he shouted, "you're drunk. I'll take your number, see if I don't."

Looker closed the trap with a bang by way of reply, and held it down hard for the next five minutes whilst he drove faster than ever. Not hearing anything more from inside for some little time, he quietly raised the trap again, and saw by the light of the street lamps that Skelton was going to sleep.

Looker, instead of pursuing the road to Putney Bridge, turned aside into the first quiet lane he came

to; then pulling up and putting the nose-bag on his horse, he opened the cab. Stepping on the footboard he seized Skelton by the collar, and without any ceremony dragged him out into the road. Skelton was thoroughly awakened by this proceeding, and, invoking his patron saint, demanded "what the—etc." the fellow meant.

"My name is Looker, Colonel Looker at your service—that is what I mean. What do *you* mean, you pitiful little scoundrel?" the colonel cried, his anger rising higher with each sentence. "What do you mean by deserting me in the hour of my extremity, and what is worse, leaving Mrs. Looker without a word in the difficult position she was in? You blackguard! You miserable, sneaking little rascal!"

The Colonel had a hand on each of Skelton's shoulders, and shook him violently by way of emphasizing each question. At the second shake Skelton's crush hat came off. On the conclusion of Looker's address he delivered a vigorous kick at Mr. Skelton's person, which sent him staggering half a dozen paces, and bestowed another kick on the hat.

"That's pleasure," continued Looker; "now for business. I have your I.O.U. for fifty pounds. I'll trouble you to pay that money instantly. I have not the paper with me, but you may rely on my word that I will send it. Pay that money this moment, or it will be worse for you."

Skelton had exactly that sum in his pocket. He had calculated that he might get rid of the Putney lady by giving her just that amount. He reluctantly produced it, and then, picking up his hat, seemed about to go.

"No, sir, that is by no means all. You are aware that I mortgaged my pension, and would be left when I came round after your disgraceful flight with nothing to live upon. You left Mrs. Looker and myself to starve, you knave! What was worse, you behaved most abominably to her when she called upon you the other day. You have dropped into an estate yourself, and don't care what becomes of anybody else. I require

you to pay me five thousand pounds — do you hear?"

"That is robbery; robbery and intimidation, Colonel Looker. I shall give you in charge for it."

"No you won't, Mr. Skelton. You dare not have any of your proceedings raked up. Your only resource is to pay."

"You are going back with me," he continued, "to a little public-house we passed just now; there I shall procure a sheet of paper and a stamp, and you will write upon it a cheque for five thousand pounds payable to Mrs. Looker. That I shall keep until I receive by an early post to-morrow at my address, which I shall give you, your promissory note for the same amount at seven days date. On my receiving it, you shall have your cheque back; if I do not receive it and you stop the cheque, you will be arrested for attempted fraud on the Eagle Insurance Company before night. I will gladly go to prison myself to get you penal servitude."

Skelton, after a while, consented, and they proceeded to the place. The inspector's cab was drawn up outside. He had lost sight of that driven by Looker, and he began to feel Skelton had befooled him with a false address.

With much curiosity he witnessed the writing of the cheque and its being handed to the cabman. "Here," he thought, "is another link in the chain."

Outside, Skelton made as though he would part from Looker. But he was not to escape that way. "I'm with you," muttered Looker through his teeth, and Skelton then mounted.

As Looker was gathering up his reins, Skelton stood up on the footboard and looked over the top of the cab towards him. "I think I will not go on to Putney to-night. Take me back to where you brought me from."

The real fact was, Skelton dared trust himself no longer with the Colonel.

Looker turned his horse round and drove back into the main road. But, instead of going back the way he had come, he presently turned again to the left. Skel-

ton found himself once more in a lonely place with his enemy ; they were now in Bishop's Avenue. Convinced by this time that he was again in danger, he stretched out his hand and seized the reins, pulling the horse up short. He instantly jumped out into the road, half stumbling as he alighted. Recovering himself, he started to run as fast as his little legs would carry him. But he was no match for Looker's horse. The cab was alongside him again in a few seconds. Skelton drew aside and stopped to let it pass ; but, as he did so, the Colonel shifted his whip in his hand, and brought down the butt-end of it on Skelton's head, knocking him down. The stock broke in Looker's hand. He pulled up his horse, intending in his rage to dismount and treat Skelton to a little more, but at that moment the inspector's cab came in sight. Having lost his whip Looker was in a difficulty, but he shouted to his horse and managed to urge the animal into a canter.

As he turned the corner he slewed himself round on his perch, and saw that the other cab had stopped near the spot where he had struck Skelton down. He drove slowly back to the stables, and found himself in debt to the manager two shillings more than his day's takings, and the price of a whip to boot.

"Oh, Herbert," cried his wife, "I am so glad to see you again. I had not meant to say anything to you about it, knowing what you had to go through yourself, but living here is really too dreadful ; can we not go to some pleasanter place than this ?"

"Not if I am to keep the establishment going out of cab-driving, Amy. I have earned less than nothing. In fact, I am not going to try it any more. But look here, my dear," he exclaimed, producing the fifty-pound note ; "I had the honour of driving Mr. Skelton this evening, and persuaded him to pay up his card debts. I think possibly we might afford to change our lodgings."

"I have also," he continued, "got a little document from the same person intended for you, as I am dead and not able to appear as the recipient of a cheque. We have compromised the insurance business for five

thousand." Here he handed her the cheque. "As my widow, you are now in possession of the amount. I really do think we may leave the lodgings, and even go back to the hotel for to-night."

Mrs. Looker burst into tears.

They lost no time in removing to the Euston Hotel once more; and, after an appetising little supper, discussed the future. They decided to move off to the West of England as soon as possible.

A good many months have elapsed since that evening, but the Lookers are still in difficulties, and the Colonel in close seclusion in the Metropolis. The promissory note failed to arrive, Skelton not being in a position to attend to business next day. Mrs. Looker accordingly proceeded to the bank to cash the cheque, and was told that Skelton's balance was "not sufficient."

The Colonel instructed his wife to threaten Skelton with an action. Sundry subsequent events in Mr. Skelton's history have delayed proceedings till the present time, but any one who is sufficiently interested to learn how the case ends, can have the desire gratified by an attendance at the Law Courts in the ensuing term, when a cause *in re Robert Wentworth Skelton, Amy Caroline Looker v. Partington and another*, is to be argued.

CHAPTER XVI.

"RISEN FROM THE DEAD."

WHEN Mr. Pringle left Belvoir Cottage after his interview with Mrs. Righton, he made his way to Putney Bridge Railway Station. Having some little time to wait for a train, he bought an evening paper. Glancing over the announcements of the meetings and fixtures for the next day, his eye was caught by the name Stacpoole. He looked down the column again, and, for a while, failed to see what he wanted. At last he lighted upon the passage, "Dinner to Mr. George

Stacpoole on his departure on the New Guinea Exploration Expedition, Holborn Restaurant, 8 p.m." Pringle accordingly was to be seen loafing about the entrance hall of the restaurant on Saturday, waiting for the arrival of the guest of the evening. His patience was at last rewarded by hearing a tall, thin, bronzed young man addressed on his entrance as "Stacpoole."

Pringle hovered round the group in which the traveller stood, till at length, as they moved away towards the room where the dinner was to be held, he found an opportunity of addressing Mr. Stacpoole.

"Excuse me, sir, but I think that it is important you should be made aware before you leave this country that you have lately been most anxiously advertised for by a party who wishes to communicate with you."

"Who is this fellow?" asked Stacpoole, turning to the manager of the restaurant, who stood in the doorway.

"You may tell the gentleman," said Pringle, who was known to the manager.

"Mr. Pringle, the well-known inquiry agent, sir."

"Well, let him take his inquiring spirit somewhere else."

"But," said Pringle, "it is one of the surgeons of St. Lawrence's Hospital who wants you, sir."

"And I don't want a doctor. It is very likely my father who is asked for."

"Where is your father, sir?" asked Pringle.

"In Ireland," was the reply, as Mr. Stacpoole disappeared within the room.

Pringle was nonplussed. He had wasted a day, and one of his theories was completely shattered. He set to work to construct another, but made little progress in putting it together.

He thought over all the events of the day. After a while he recollected that the name of Baigent had been used. It reminded him of something, but of what he could not quite hit upon. The only idea he had was that it had some vague connection with some papers he had turned over on one of his visits to Scotland Yard.

Next day he went down to the police office with the intention of finding an excuse to overhaul the papers hanging against the wall there once more.

Fortune favoured him. Only one of the younger detectives was in the office, a man whose early and enthusiastic zeal was not yet sufficiently tempered with discretion. Pringle was known to him by sight, and admired by him as one of the heroes of espionage. He politely invited the agent into the inner room.

"Now, young man," said Pringle, "I suppose you have begun to find out that it takes time to get on in the Yard. The old buffers like Cross want to keep all the good business to themselves?"

The detective assented, and entered into an exposition of a grievance he nourished against Inspector Nangle.

"Well now, if you like," said Pringle, "I can put you on a very good thing that they have all failed at. You will find all about the reward on those papers hanging in the outer office; and I know, I rather fancy, where the party is to be found. Come and let me show you what I mean."

Pringle had no more than a very faint idea that there might be something that would throw a light on the mystery. When he presently came to the bill containing the description of the robbery, he was overjoyed.

"Oh, that's what you mean," said the detective. "Why we've got the notes here in the office. Nangle thinks he has spotted the man."

"Yes, but does he know where the man is? Now I do. I have him all snug. If you like to get the warrant, and go with me, we can take him and let Nangle see that he is not the only smart man in the Yard."

They agreed to halve the reward, and to meet the following evening after Pringle had finished some business that would occupy him. Meanwhile, the young detective was to get possession of the all-important warrant.

About half-past eight on the Monday evening, Pringle and his companion drove up in a four-wheeled cab to

the gate of Belvoir Cottage, and rang the bell. They asked for Dr. Righton.

"Who is it, Ellen?" asked the doctor, who was sitting in Bowman's room, where the whole family were assembled, having just finished acquainting Mr. Nugent with the strange events that had befallen the son of his old friend.

"They won't give any names, sir," replied the servant; "but one of them is that man that came and saw Missis on Friday."

Mrs. Righton turned very pale. "He is a man who came here and accused you, Cuthbert, of having brought a body here from the cemetery. He talked as if he belonged to the police, and would not be satisfied till I let him have a look at Charles here, and showed him that he was alive."

"I remember," said Olive. "We thought it so funny afterwards. But I quite forgot to say anything about him."

The fact was that all four—Mrs. Righton, Olive, Cicely, and Bowman—had been so occupied with thinking of matters matrimonial and amatory that Pringle's visit had slipped from their minds.

"This is perhaps something serious," said the doctor. "Come into the next room, Mr. Nugent, for a moment."

When the doctor had closed the door, he again went over to Mr. Nugent the events that had brought Bowman into the dangerous position he occupied with regard to the police. Mrs. Righton was called into the room and Cicely came with her.

Mr. Nugent, by a good deal of questioning, gleaned from Mrs. Righton all the particulars of her interview with Pringle.

"After all," he remarked presently, "the matter these men have come about may not be what we imagine. We had better have them in and hear what they want."

They rang the bell, and Pringle and his companion were ushered into the room.

Pringle, who knew where the invalid lay, and had

some idea of the topography of the house, would not enter farther than the doorway, whence he could keep an eye on the other door of Bowman's room.

"So it's you, Mr. Pringle," said the doctor. "What can I do for you? Have you brought me some information at last?"

"Well, I've *got* some information, sir, which has brought me here. Can I have a word with you alone?"

"What is it about, Mr. Pringle?" asked Righton, following him into the passage outside.

"It is rather a painful business," said the agent: "Perhaps you know I was down here the other day, and saw the young man you have in hiding. It is a very fine dodge to make him up as an invalid and keep him here, whilst he is being hunted for all over England, but you see we always find these things out. The fact is we want him for a bank robbery. We know all about him and who he is. My mate here, who is from Scotland Yard, has the warrant. You had better let us see him at once, and relieve you from annoyance as soon as possible."

"You cannot see him, Mr. Pringle," replied the doctor, decidedly. "He is only barely convalescent after a most dangerous injury to the head. It is as much as his life is worth to mention anything of the kind to him. As his medical attendant I positively forbid it."

"That is all very well, Doctor; we quite understand all about these little matters. Whilst you are talking to us here our friend in yonder may be getting away. Morgan, let the gentleman see the warrant."

The younger intruder produced the document, and Righton stepped forward to take it. As he did so Pringle slipped past him in the direction of Bowman's door; before he reached it he was suddenly confronted by that magnificent being, a beautiful woman transformed with the courage and determination born of high-wrought feeling.

It was Cicely who had caught the drift of matters

through the half-opened door, and had passed through the inner doors into Bowman's room. Suddenly emerging by the entrance Pringle was making for, she faced the agent with a mien before which he cowered.

With head erect and widely opened eyes, her bosom heaving with the excitement of the moment, she stood a figure that would make a painter's fortune, could artist have seen her at that supreme instant and have transferred the vision to his canvas.

"Back, sir," she cried. "How dare you violate the sanctity of the chamber where a sick man lies. It is in the hands of God whether he shall recover or not. Keep away with your crawling suspicions. We know your story; but we know too he is innocent. It is only for the innocent that God works miracles to-day, and for him you seek a miracle has been wrought. He has not been snatched from death only to become the victim of a man like you. Seek the man who is the author of all this misfortune and arrest *him*; but don't act so that you will have to come here and apologise for having killed the wrong man, mistaking him for the real criminal."

Mr. Pringle was the first to recover from the amazement into which the group had been thrown by Cicely's appearance.

"My dear young lady, you do not understand. You have been deceived by an artful scoundrel. You ought to be glad to get him out of the house if you only knew." He advanced a step as he spoke and would have pushed the girl aside, when Righton seized him by the shoulder and dragged him backward.

Pringle turned his head; he was in a rage. "You have assaulted me in the execution of my duty, Dr. Righton. You will learn what that means before you are a day older."

Righton made no answer; he pushed the man from before him with violence, and rushed to the side of his sister just in time to catch her as she sank down in a dead faint.

At the same instant a loud knock at the outer door of the cottage resounded through the hall.

The scuffle between the doctor and Pringle had been by no means noiseless. The latter had shouted his threat in his loudest tones, so that the whole household rushed into the hall where Righton was holding his sister in his arms. The excited servants crowded together in the doorway leading from the kitchen. Mr. Nugent was picking up his spectacles, which had bounced off his nose as he appeared on the scene just in time to have Pringle hurled against him by the doctor. Mrs. Righton and Olive ran towards Cicely. Morgan, the detective, was the only person who retained any composure, and it was he who strode to the door and opened it, to find Inspector Cross propping against the side of the porch the form of a young man smeared and plastered with mud.

The inspector did not at the moment recognise his subordinate. "Here you, sir," he cried, taking him for a servant, "just lend a hand, will you? This young chap has been getting a hiding, and I picked him up in the road outside and took the liberty of bringing him to the nearest house. Help me in with him, and let us see what is wrong with him."

"Certainly, Mr. Cross," replied Morgan, stepping out into the porch and taking Skelton by the arm. "You and me have dropped into a house full of little surprises to-night."

Inspector Cross looked at him curiously in the dim light.

"Hallo, Morgan! What are you doing here?" he cried.

"Why, I came down with Mr. Pringle to take the bank-robber we've been after. They have him in here shamming ill."

"Nonsense. I tell you, man, I have the very man here myself on this doorstep, and the warrant in my pocket; it was taken out this very afternoon. You and Pringle are two fools. You have found a mare's nest."

Pringle came forward at this, pulling down his waist-coat, and wiping his face. "What is this, Morgan?" he asked.

"Why, the inspector says he's got the man we are after. This drunken fellow he has picked up in the road."

"That's only his kid," Pringle replied, "just to put us off the scent. Quick! slip into the other room and nail our man before he can be beforehand with us."

"You will do nothing of the kind, Morgan. Is Mr. Pringle your superior officer, or am I? Help me in with this fellow, as I ordered you."

Morgan and the inspector brought Skelton in and seated him in a chair. "Here, get a cloth and let us get some of this mud off his face, so that we can see what is the matter with him."

Meanwhile the doctor and his mother had taken Cicely into the adjoining room, where she was rapidly coming round. Leaving her with his mother and Olive, who had joined them, Righton came out again to learn the cause of the fresh disturbance.

"What is the matter here?" he asked.

Mr. Nugent, who was engaged in keeping Pringle away from the door of Bowman's room, replied, "An accident, so far as I can make out from these fellows who will both speak at the same time. Another policeman has come in with that object on the chair. Your house seems to me, Dr. Righton, like a police station in the neighbourhood of the New Cut on a Saturday night."

"Are you a doctor, sir?" asked Cross. Righton stepped forward to where they were wiping Skelton's face.

"This man has met with an accident, or rather I should say with his deserts, for he is a regular out and out rascal. A cabman who is one of his pals, so far as I can make out, has been falling out with him and letting him have it. I don't think there is anything very much the matter with him."

As Righton approached and took Skelton's wrist in

his fingers, he recognized him with a start and dropped the hand, the back of which fell with a bang against the hard corner of the chair. The pain brought Skelton out of his faint at once.

"So it's you, Mr. Corbett of Hammersmith, is it? I wanted you before, but I want you very much more now. Never an angel appeared more opportunely than you do; you very antithesis of an angel!"

Pringle came forward on hearing the word Corbett pronounced. "No, thank you, Mr. Pringle," Righton continued; "I think we can manage without you now."

The inspector grinned, and laid his hand on Skelton's shoulder.

"Another mistake. This man," said he, "is not Corbett, but Skelton, wanted for stealing money from Messrs Baigent and Co.'s clerk. I arrest you, Robert Wentworth Skelton, under the warrant which I have here."

Cross felt compelled to take this step, though his case was still incomplete. It was his only chance, for he well knew that his man would have been out of the country before daylight otherwise.

"Now, Pringle," went on the inspector, "you ain't wanted here any longer. Morgan and I can take care of this joker. You be off and shadow a bankrupt or a co-respondent or two."

Pringle hesitated.

"Go out, sir, this instant," added the doctor.

The inquiry agent turned upon him. "Here, Morgan," he cried, "run this gentleman in for assaulting me in the execution of my duty."

"Duty!" sneered Cross; "why he ain't in the force at all. Turn him out, Morgan."

Mr. Pringle disappeared, as the grinning policeman opened the door for him.

Mr. Nugent meanwhile had been waiting for an opportunity to speak, and now took advantage of it.

"You scamp," he cried, shaking his fist at Skelton; "you mean, base, cowardly villain, to fasten your guilt upon an innocent man! It is worth a thousand pounds

to me to see you caught at last, with the hand of justice upon your collar. You shall be prosecuted, Skelton, by the ablest counsel at the bar, and I hope you will be as miserable for the rest of your life as you would have left the man you robbed to be. Take him away, officer; his presence is a disgrace!"

Skelton, who had looked up at Mr. Nugent as that gentleman shouted out his tirade, turned his gaze wearily aside. All at once his eyes started, and became fixed with terror. He sprang from his chair, shrieking "RISEN FROM THE DEAD!!" and fell heavily forward upon his face on the floor. He lay foaming and convulsed—a spectacle horrible to look upon.

Mr. Nugent instinctively turned to see the cause of this sudden shriek.

There in the doorway of his room stood Bowman, the white bandage enveloping his head, his pale thin face showing like a ghost's, his bony hand with pointing finger extended towards Skelton, his eyes gleaming with a strange light.

It was a sight that startled the inspector, and even Mr. Nugent, who had been with Bowman so shortly before.

Bowman had caught the words of Mr. Nugent's shouted speech, and rising, had tottered to the doorway to confront the man who had wrought him so much ill.

Righton hurried forward, and led him back into his room; whilst the detectives seized Skelton, who was dashing himself about, howling and cursing most horribly.

Cross held his hands, whilst, with the greatest difficulty, Morgan slipped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists.

The torrent of blasphemy continued, and the man's violence seemed to increase. He raised his head and bit Morgan's finger to the bone.

At this juncture Dr. Righton appeared. "For God's sake take that fellow out of earshot; he will kill my patient. Why!" said he, looking at Skelton intently, "the man is mad! raving mad!"

"Get us a cord, Doctor," called out Cross; "we must tie him, or he will do mischief."

Mr. Nugent started to find one, but the servants were all too frightened to attend to him.

Righton snatched the counterpane off Bowman's bed, and with this they contrived to bind their prisoner.

Half an hour later, he was removed by two policemen to the nearest station, and by next day was lodged in the padded room of the asylum.

His punishment came in one swift moment. Agony of mind, such as might have made him abjectly miserable for years, was concentrated into an instant. The Divine vengeance fell upon him and blasted him in wrath. His crime had overtaken him. His sin had found him out.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE MAY WEEK."

To see an undergraduate at his best, you ought to be the recipient of his hospitality during the gala week of the year. There is no more kindly, no pleasanter, and,—if it gratifies you to be fussed over—no more fussy host, than the young Oxford or Cambridge man when he feasts his "people" in his rooms at such a time. What preparations he makes! How particular he is in his commands on that special preparatory visit to the college kitchen! How carefully he looks over the luncheon table beforehand to see that everything is in resplendent order! How many times he goes outside his door to yell to his bed-maker! And how wonderfully attentive that functionary, expectant of the maternal sovereign, is on such occasions.

Behold Bowman transformed into such an anxious host; Bowman, no longer sought for by the police, no longer friendless, no longer ghostlike, but ruddy with abundant health, no longer a city clerk, but now, in this

leafy month of June, a full-blown Cambridge man at the end of his second term.

We saw him, months ago, pointing with denunciatory finger at the terror-stricken author of his misfortunes; we see him again with his great trouble almost forgotten, as it had been a bad dream.

Mr. Nugent had played the fairy-godmother, and played the part well. A day or two after we saw him last, he visited Sir Samuel Baigent at his office. Sir Samuel had already heard from Inspector Cross all the particulars of what had taken place.

"You see," said he, "you put the saddle on the wrong horse for once in your life, Baigent. You have been saved from making a great mistake and spoiling the boy's future."

The banker hummed and hawed. "Yes," he observed, "I suppose we must let the young man come back again and resume his duties. It will be a lesson for him; another time, perhaps, he will be more careful when he is in charge of the Bank's property."

"Well, Baigent, to tell the truth, I don't want him to come back here," said Mr. Nugent. "He is the son of my old and dear friend, and I feel as if he has specially been placed under my care. I am a childless man, going fast down the hill, and I want to do something for him before I die. If his father had lived, he would have gone to college, and I have determined now to be a father to him so far as I can."

"In point of fact," said Sir Samuel, "you mean to adopt him, I suppose?"

"No, I didn't say that, but I am going to give him a chance," Mr. Nugent replied. "We shall see what he is made of when he gets to the University. If he is proof against the temptations he will meet with there, then, after a time, I may do as you imagine."

So it came to pass that the following winter, Bowman, then quite restored to health, went up to Cambridge as a bye-term man. Not to his father's old college, as he could have wished, but to Corpus, where Mr. Nugent had been.

He spent his Easter at Cottisham Court, and then it was arranged that Mrs. Righton and Cicely, with Mr. Nugent should visit him in the "May Week."

But before the trees in "The Backs" put on their mantle of green Mr. Nugent was stricken down. Paralysis fell upon him, and Righton earned his first big fee. Instead of marching with his *protégé* along King's Parade as he had anticipated, with his Master's gown rustling behind him and a tall silk hat upon his head, the Squire was being wheeled about the terrace of Cottisham Court in a Bath-chair. The attack came within two days after he had made his will and made Bowman heir of his unentailed property.

Mrs. Righton and her daughter were therefore the only friends Bowman had "up." He had given them a glorious time. They sat in the Senate House and saw England's future king receive his Doctor's degree. Prime Minister and Professor, Statesman and Warrior, passed up before them to receive the honours of the University. They sorrowed, with the rest of the brilliant throng, for the sturdy Englishman illness kept away, the erewhile blind partizan, who in old age had come to prefer patriotism to party. They sat out the Rede Lecture. They heard the anthem at King's. They sauntered along the avenues of Trinity, and puzzled over the time-honoured question about the stone balls on Clare Bridge. They drove over to Grassy and waved handkerchiefs as the Corpus boat went past. Alas! Bowman was no longer a rowing man; the injury he had received prevented that. They went to the Pastoral Play at Downing. They visited the "Footlights" and the "A. D. C." And now the visit is coming to an end. Bowman is giving them the last luncheon before they return.

His rooms are on the ground floor of the New Court at Corpus. The window is thrown open for the sake of coolness, the breeze floats in scented by the flowers in the stand. Bowman sits at the head of his table, his friend Firker sits opposite.

Firker has received private instructions from Bowman

to be very attentive to the elder lady, and leave the coast clear for Bowman to talk to Cicely. Firker obligingly complies. But, bless you! Mrs. Righton is quite alive to the whole arrangement. She wishes nothing better than that the very active love-making, she cannot help but see is going on, should end in Charles and Cicely's engagement. In fact, she will be highly pleased if something definite should be arrived at before they return to Fulham. Bowman is too nice, too good, and too eligible a prospective son-in-law, to be allowed to become the prey of any intriguing Cambridgeshire girl if Mrs. Righton can prevent it. So she is equally ready to listen to the chatter of the entertaining Firker. The gyp and the bed-maker exchange grins as they see how absorbed Cicely and Bowman are. The female menial scents tips, out of which she will beguile Bowman in future terms, by talking of "that bootiful young lady as came up in 'the May,' and turned hall the genelman's 'eads."

"Cicely," half whispered Bowman—they have got as far as "Cicely" and "Charles"—"Cicely, you will have to make a speech after luncheon."

"What for? How silly I should look."

"I don't mean to the others, I mean just to me. Only a very little one; you can whisper it if you like. I once, you know, heard you make the most magnificent speech I ever heard in my life. That night when Skelton and the policemen came; I overheard you; it was splendid."

"Oh, but that was an exceptional occasion—a matter of life and death. I was carried away out of myself."

"This will be a still more exceptional occasion, Cicely. A matter of life and death too. I will remind you about it this evening. You must make it with your whole heart. One little word will do, you know."

Cicely looked down, and Bowman tried to squeeze her hand under the corner of the table. But, alas! he could not reach far enough, and the lady did not meet him half-way.

"What were you saying about Skelton just now, Charles?" asked Mrs. Righton, turning round towards Bowman. "I thought I heard you mention his name,

but could not quite catch what you said. I was telling Mr. Firker about that night when they brought the man to Belvoir Cottage."

"Oh, nothing particular," replied Bowman. "I believe I did just mention his name. By the way, the doctor went to see him the other day; what sort of state was he in?"

"Very bad. His senses have left him completely. He believes he is in the lower regions, and being tortured frightfully. He yells in the most terrific manner, and says the most dreadful things about what he imagines to be going on around him."

"I've often heard madness called a living death," said Firker, "but this must be the very worst kind of living death, to fancy you are already suffering in the infernal regions."

"Appalling!" exclaimed Bowman. The party sat in silence for few moments. Presently Bowman resumed his conversation with Cicely.

"What has become of Miss Mudge? Do you ever hear anything of her?" he asked.

"Not lately. You see there has been rather a coolness since she became engaged."

"Engaged? I did not hear of that. Not to your brother?"

"No, he admired her very much," replied Cicely, "and in many ways she is a very nice girl, but she refused him."

"I suppose there was somebody else," said Bowman.

"Not just at that time, I fancy. I have an idea she thought it would not do, owing to her relations. Poor Cuthbert was very much cast down by her refusal; though I think he would have asked her again, but one day she wrote saying she was engaged to an American dentist."

"A dentist! What a very romantic match it will be!"

"He has a very romantic name," said Cicely. "Perhaps that had something to do with it. He is called Romeo Coffin."

"Romantic and appropriate," remarked Mrs. Righton.

Bowman roared with laughter. "And how does your brother take it?" he asked.

"He never speaks of it. He is more devoted to his profession than ever, if that is any sign."

Later in the day they went to see the Procession of Boats. Bowman had procured tickets for the reserved part of the lawn, and they strolled in the well-dressed crowd on the bank of the river, taking part in a scene which, with its surroundings, can be found nowhere else in the world.

Most people know something of the Cambridge "Backs," and can picture the sight they beheld in the evening sunshine, with King's and Clare in front of them across the water, colleges showing to right and left through the leafy vistas; groves and gardens all around.

Firker, one of the tallest men in the University, led the way with Mrs. Righton. Cicely and Bowman slowly followed.

"Now, Cicely," says Bowman, "about that speech?"

Cicely breathes quickly and gazes across the water, making no reply.

"I am sure you know what I want you to say," he says, in a low, eager voice.

"Really, I hardly do know what you mean," she answers. "You have been so very mysterious about it."

"Well, I said it was an exceptional occasion—a life and death occasion. It is all that to me, Cicely." Then, dropping to a whisper, he says in her blushing ear, "Darling, I love you; don't you care just a little bit about me?"

Cicely does breathe a little word, but does it so faintly that even Bowman's expectant ear almost fails to catch it. He hears enough to be aware that it was not "No" she sighed.

"Say it bravely, my dearest," he urges.

"Come along, Charles," she says. "Look at those young men laughing at us. How horrid of them! I almost believe they knew what you said."

So they did, if we may judge from the way in which

one of them observed, when Bowman returned to college that evening—"Take her, and be happy, my boy; she's yours. I must say I congratulate you on your taste."

When they get up to where Mrs. Righton and Firker stand they are in quite a crowd, watching the antics of some men in canoes, who purposely upset each other's craft in the water, and cause great laughter. In the crowd, Cicely steals her hand into Bowman's.

"Say that again," he pleads. "You must make your speech with your whole heart, you know."

"Yes," she says, this time quite steadily and clearly. "There, sir, I hope you are satisfied."

"You darling!" he says; "this more than makes up for everything that has befallen me."

We will leave them there, standing hand in hand, as they hope to go through life. Lost as they are to all but themselves in the middle of that fashionable crowd, they are yet in a solitude so absolute and so delightful that neither you nor I may dare to invade it.

THE END.

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“Want of space will not permit us to enter fully into this interesting subject as we should have liked, nor can we follow Mr. Russell through the exhaustive particulars of his remedy, but we give the salient points. He criticises the various so-called remedies, and calls attention to the fact that other cures, including Mr. Banting's, and the others alluded to above, do not profess to do more than temporarily reduce fat, whereas he aims to effect an absolute cure, which is a most important consideration; secondly, his mixture to be taken is simply a vegetable compound, containing no deleterious poison, and otherwise perfectly harmless. The medicine he describes as an agreeable, refreshing, and cooling anti-febrile invigorating tonic, which stimulates the digestive organs and contracts the muscular fibre of the stomach, and imparts vigour to the system, altering and improving the condition of the blood. It has no deleterious effect on the most delicate subject, promoting an invigorating and healthy action of the organs and developing muscular power. It is most agreeable and refreshing to drink, which is another great advantage, and it appears that many ladies now adopt this drink at the table as a sort of corpulent prophylactic. The average reduction of weight appears to be about 3 lb. or 4 lb. a week, but as much as 8 lb. has been lost in this time. He advises persons to commence his treatment, and rid themselves of the disease, and not to discontinue it after the first temporary reduction of fat. He gives also his scale by which one can see how much they are in excess of their normal weight, which appears to be very useful. We think that every person who suffers from obesity should communicate with him.” The following is the table of weights alluded to above:—

A person	5 ft.	0 in.	height should weigh	8 st.	0 lb.
“	5 ft.	1 in.	“	8 st.	8 lb.
“	5 ft.	2 in.	“	9 st.	0 lb.
“	5 ft.	3 in.	“	9 st.	7 lb.
“	5 ft.	4 in.	“	9 st.	10 lb.
“	5 ft.	5 in.	“	10 st.	2 lb.
“	5 ft.	6 in.	“	10 st.	5 lb.
“	5 ft.	7 in.	“	10 st.	8 lb.
“	5 ft.	8 in.	“	11 st.	1 lb.
“	5 ft.	9 in.	“	11 st.	8 lb.
“	5 ft.	10 in.	“	12 st.	1 lb.
“	5 ft.	11 in.	“	12 st.	6 lb.
“	6 ft.	0 in.	“	12 st.	10 lb.

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LOWE'S PILLS SAVE DOCTOR'S BILLS.

52, Dunstall Road, Wolverhampton, October 10th, 1886.
Mr. R. H. Lowe,—Dear Sir, I have used your Pills for upwards of 25 years in Wolverhampton. I am unable to say that they have cured any specific illness, but, under Providence, I believe the regular use of your Pills has kept me in the normal state of health that I at present enjoy. During that long period I have not had occasion to spend a sixpence with the medical profession. I must add that I always call or send to your own establishment for my boxes, for fear of being the victim of the numerous impostures and imitations of other vendors. It may be that, as your circulars state, the seal mentioned in your circulars renders such a precaution unnecessary, but I like to make assurance doubly sure. You are at liberty to make any legitimate use of the foregoing statement.—Yours truly,

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Mr. Lowe.

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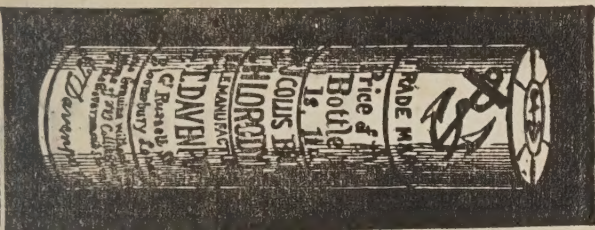
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